THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

35 ¢ APRIL

Lester del Rey

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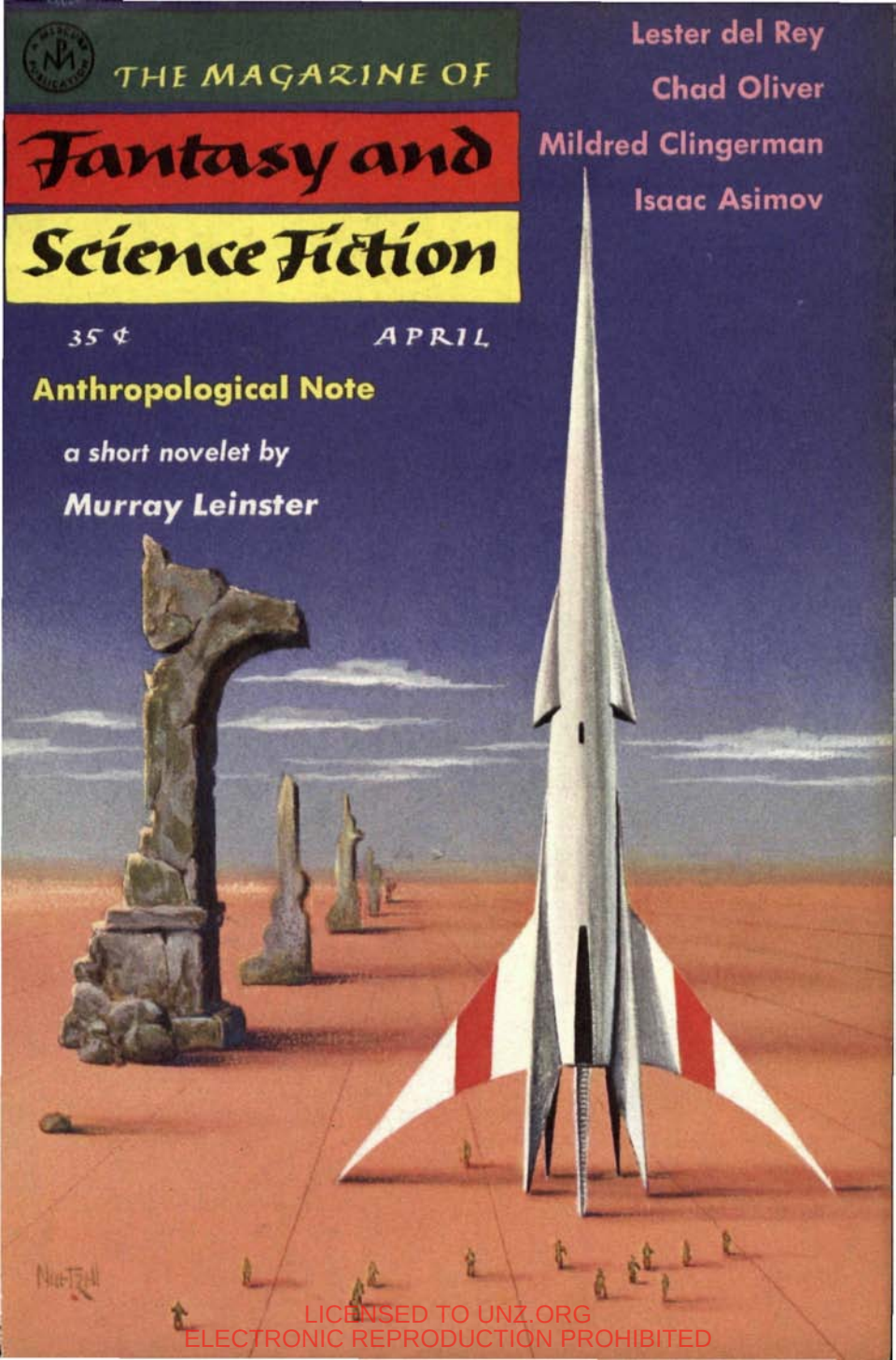
Mildred Clingerman

Isaac Asimov

Anthropological Note

a short novelet by

Murray Leinster



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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 12, No. 4 APRIL

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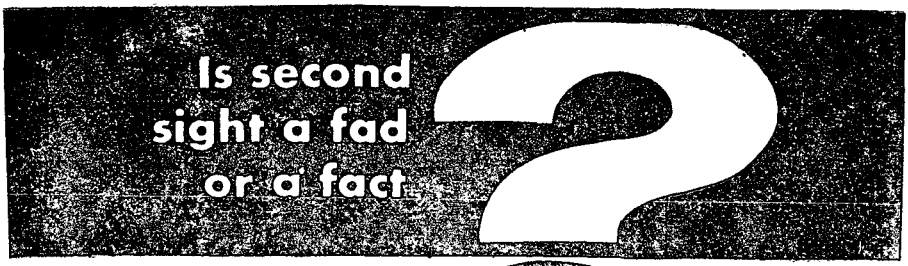

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Few titles are so loosely bandied about as that of "the Dean of Science Fiction"—a term which has been applied at one time or another to virtually every living male professional, with the possible exception of Harlan Ellison. But if there is a dean, a doyen, a decanus of American s.f., the title unquestionably belongs to Will F. Jenkins/William Fitzgerald/Murray Leinster, in point of age (b. 1896), length of service (1915-), and quality of his best work (De Profundis, First Contact, Keyhole, The Wobbler, The Power, *and a list of further titles that could easily fill this page). Leinster (to use the one of his names which occurs most frequently in our field) has written every type of general fiction, and more specifically every type of science fiction—adventurous, humorous, technological, fantastic, psychological. . . . His first story in F&SF belongs to the anthropological school (a school of which he was a prime founder and developer)—a sharply ironic study of the peculiar sexual customs of a primitive Venusian race . . . and of the somewhat primitive vices and vengeances of the civilized earthmen.*

Anthropological Note

by MURRAY LEINSTER

THE MEETING OF MISS CUMMINGS and Ray Hale in a Krug village on Venus is one of those events for which there is no real explanation. Unless one believes that there was or is a Th'Tark, who arranged the matter, it simply doesn't make sense. But it did happen. Miss Cummings met Hale under quite preposterous circumstances in a female-Krug village. She had known him before, a good many years since and forty million miles away. Then she had passionately wished for sudden death to strike him. When, after years, she saw him again she knew the same wish and what followed very probably prevented the extermination of the Krug in the name of the prosperity of interplanetary commerce. This would amount to a proof of Th'Tark's interest—if there ever was a Th'Tark. But it's all very complicated.

Th'Tark is or was the possibly

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mythical Law-giver of the Krug, who are the quasi-semi-humanoid inhabitants of the Krug Archipelago in the Summer Sea on Venus. They look more human than most earthly primates, probably because they aren't furry, and Th'Tark is said to have set up their laws and customs and very dubious moral code some tens of thousands of Venusian years ago. It was Th' Tark who decreed that male Krug should live dispirited, gloomy lives in the jungles by the seashore while female Krug built villages, practiced agriculture and other useful arts, and raised children. Miss Cummings was the lady anthropologist who examined their culture and kept them from extermination.

She landed in their midst from a survey-ship offshore from an island which on the map is called Tanit. The morning of her arrival was quite ordinary. There was no sunrise, of course. There never is. There was blackness everywhere at first, and then the sky became ever-so-faintly gray, and the cloudbank overhead lightened by imperceptible degrees, and presently it was morning with leaping waves all about the ship and foaming surf on the beaches and at the foot of the cliffs of the island a mile away. She prepared to land alone, as a field expedition in anthropology with qualified assistants in the base, which was the ship. Her purpose was pure science, but the reason was interplanetary trade.

Venus wasn't well-settled then, and the cost of transportation to Earth was so high that only very precious things indeed could stand the cost and show a profit. But in the Krug Archipelago such a product had been found. It was *crythli* pearls and pearl-shell. They were utterly beautiful and utterly past imitation. They were the most desirable gems that men had ever seen, and their value was fabulous. But the few—still extremely rare—specimens which had been found had been discovered in the possession of male Krug in the jungles. The Krug were not anxious to part with them. They mentioned Th' Tark and females—the latter very reluctantly—and shut up. Moreover, when a Krug began to gather *crythli* shell and pearls, it was a sign that shortly he would disappear. Permanently. So trade in *crythli* pearls and pearl-shell languished, and the economic status of the Venusian colony needed interplanetary exchange. Hence Miss Cummings.

On this particular morning a helicopter lifted heavily from the ship and droned toward the island. Miss Cummings was in a landing-basket slung below. At four thousand feet altitude she could see the whole island, ringed by foam, with high mountains and broad valleys in its interior. The copter skimmed sharp-edged mountain-peaks and then settled down and down into the valley where a chosen village

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lay. The village had been studied by telephotography from the air, and Miss Cummings already had a fascinating list of questions to be answered. Why, for example, were there only females and Krug-children in the village? No picture had showed any male older than what would be earliest teen-age in a human. Was it true that the larger, kraal-like thatched dwellings belonged to multiparous lady Krug, while the curiously incomplete circle of quite small houses belonged to hopeful maidens? And those small, rounded, flower-beds before the kraal-houses. Filter-photography insisted that they were tastefully bordered with *crythli* shell, used by the Krug as clam-shells are sometimes used by the owners of beach-cottages on Earth. If this were true, they were fabulously valuable and the prosperity of the human colony on Venus required that they be acquired—by peaceful means if possible, but acquired—for shipment back to Earth.

Miss Cummings knew the blissful anticipation of a lady anthropologist with a new culture to study and assurance of credit for the job. She was utterly happy as the copter droned on down to land her for the beginning of her research. Of all things and persons in the solar system, she thought least of Ray Hale. But he was of paramount importance to her job, actually. As she watched the sprawling, thatched-roof village enlarge at her approach, Hale was doing some research, too. That very same morning, in fact. But his methods were his own.

He had quite a reputation, had Hale. The colonial government had learned of his arrival on Venus just too late to grab him before he vanished into unexplored territory. He wasn't welcome on a newly colonized planet. He'd caused the First Native War on Mars, by taking advantage of the fact that at that time human law had not defined the killing of Martians as murder. He was responsible for the B'setse Massacre on Titan, when a hundred and fifty human colonists died as the result of his treatment of the most ancient and therefore richest of the Titanian natives nearby. He got away with rich loot from Titan, as he had on Mars, but colonial government officials didn't want him around.

On this particular morning, not three hundred miles from where Miss Cummings landed, he was doing research in his own fashion. He'd caught a male Krug and was extracting information from him. Traders after *crythli* shell had developed a sort of pidgin-Krug with which limited communication was possible, and Hale used that as part of his process. The rest of it would not be nice to describe. But he was forcing his captive to try to tell him, by an inadequate means of communication, facts he probably didn't know about mysteries

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he almost certainly didn't understand and positively didn't like to think about.

It was an extremely revolting performance, and it lasted a long time, but Hale probably enjoyed it. He was still a fairly handsome man—his good looks had been important in the affair causing Miss Cummings' passionate desire for lightning to strike him—but he wasn't at all attractive as he worked on the Krug. The whole business was ghastly, but Th'Tark probably allowed it. After all, it bore upon the preservation of the Krug race and culture from extermination.

In any case, when Hale finally killed the Krug and washed the debris overboard from the deck of his stolen boat, he knew where *crythli* shells were found. But he didn't think of looking for them himself. Instead, he took other information the Krug had yielded, and rather zestfully worked out a pattern for action which should yield him all the *crythli* pearls a man could want. The shell itself was precious, as mother-of-pearl had been, but the pearls themselves were more precious a thousand times over.

Three hundred miles away, Miss Cummings arrived at the chosen village. The helicopter circled that straggling settlement and a small horde of Krug swarmed out to stare up at it. Maybe they thought Th'Tark had something to do with it. (Maybe Th'Tark had.) They stared up—almost exclusively female. The exceptions were children—boy-Krug. The copter settled gently until the landing-basket touched ground. Miss Cummings cast off. The copter rose to the cloud-bank overhead where Th'Tark was reputed to dwell, and remained handy to come back within two minutes if Miss Cummings called for it by communicator. She had a small, nearly invisible hand-weapon with which to hold Krug off that long if necessary.

She didn't need to. The villagers approached her warily. But they observed that she was female. She had adopted a costume which emphasized the Krugoid features of a human woman. She held up gifts. Beaming, she offered them.

In five minutes she informed the copter crew that she wouldn't need them, but they stayed overhead anyhow just in case.

The business of making friends went on swimmingly. Miss Cummings was beautifully equipped for field investigation of a female social system. Before coming to Venus she'd taught denatured anthropology to classes of human college girls. She knew her females. For example, the older matrons of the Krug village had exactly the authoritative and self-satisfied air of a committee of college alumnae. They were middle-aged or older and accustomed to having their own way under all circumstances.

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To them Miss Cummings was charmingly deferential. There was one awkward moment, but it soon passed over. Miss Cummings, trying to begin speech, pointed to some object and used the trade-Krug male language word for it. Her audience tittered. Miss Cummings knew instantly that male and female Krug spoke different languages—as in some primitive cultures on Earth—and it was indecorous for one sex to use a noun or verb appropriate to the other. But Miss Cummings made no other break. The younger females, she observed, wore the impatient expression of human college girls. She addressed them cheerfully. To the older matrons she distributed necklaces of fluorescent beads and to the younger she passed out bracelets and small mirrors. The young females thereupon treated her with the tolerant condescension the young give to the older in all races without exception.

She even dealt adequately with the children. Mature Krug wore crudely woven garments, but the Krug-children were as innocent of clothing as of guile. To them she distributed sweetmeats. Not candy, of course. Krug taste-buds are not like human ones. She passed out bonbons of almost pure quinine and the Krug-children went into ecstasies over the luxury. But Miss Cummings discovered that the community did not approve the wasting of such things upon boys. Only future Krug matrons were worthy of largesse.

By nightfall Miss Cummings had been accepted as a welcome visitor and assigned one of the smaller houses in the incomplete circle which from air-photos had been considered the maidens' houses. Next day she set to work to acquire a vocabulary.

Hale—a shade under three hundred miles away, now—caught a second Krug male. This time he chose one of the youngest of those dispirited creatures who loaf and lurk in the jungles of the Krug islands. This creature he treated gently, at intervals, plying him with quinine and alternate beatings and cajolings. He got from him—and recorded for study—the female-language words which the younger Krug remembered more fully than an older one would have done. It was a racking experience for the adolescent Krug. He'd been kicked out of his village and stridently told to go and associate with the other worthless males in the jungle. He was embittered. But Hale made him recall and repeat all his childhood experiences. In the end he kicked his second captive ashore and prepared to make use of the data he'd acquired. He had no faintest desire to perform any action for the preservation of the Krug race. It just happened that way—though only Th'Tark could possibly have thought of it in advance. *If* there is a Th'Tark.

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At the end of a week in the village, Miss Cummings was in an anthropologist's idea of heaven. She was doing the first known research on an extensive race-culture, and she had skilled help on the steamer, and she would get all the credit. But the help was important. For example, the Krug language required careful analysis. Not only were there male and female versions which were wholly unlike, but there were honorific terms as in Japanese, which could have been pitfalls. Different forms of address were used to different Krug matrons according to whether they had one or two or more children up to a dozen, after which a superhonorific applied. This could have caused trouble.

With the research staff on the ship, however, she learned to speak with remarkable speed. Up to a cercertain point. At a definite place she ran into frustration. As a human being, Miss Cummings could never fully believe that the Krug language had no word meaning *why?* The lack of it was like a blank stone wall preventing progress. Her communicator sent all her gathered information to the ship, with her comments. The philologists labored over it. In long discussions between ship and village, Miss Cummings led in the discovery that the language had only one gender (female) but all personal pronouns had thirty-two forms, honorific or self-deprecatory. There was an incredibly complex system of verb-conjugations, and a fine and adequate vocabulary of nouns. But all the nouns were proper ones! The word which meant *tree* meant *this tree*. There was no word for the abstract notion of treeness which was common to all arborescent plants. Therefore there was no verbal machinery for the operations of logic.

On the face of it, the fact was impossible. The Krug were civilized in their fashion, and they definitely used speech to convey objective information. But they did not discuss. They did not argue. They were invincibly literal-minded, and therefore they were probably quite happy. But Miss Cummings was not pleased when she asked about this custom and that—and the framing of a question was a tortuous process—and received the bland and irrelevant reply that she was this-unmarried-female. She couldn't ask why her status prevented her being told. There was no *why*. It was definitely a female culture.

She seethed. She almost resented her unmarried state, since it prevented the pursuance of anthropological research. With the peculiar jealousy of a woman scientific worker, she began to envision a married woman being hastily supplied with the data she'd compiled and then sent in to replace her. It could be said that she burned.

Th'Tark could have told her to

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be at ease, of course, if anybody could. If the Krug were to escape extermination by the march of progress, Miss Cummings had to be responsible. Because she knew Ray Hale.

He'd gathered quite a lot of information she didn't have, by the time the language difficulty had reached its most frustrating form for her. Before she'd been in the village more than two weeks, Hale had acquired close to a quart of *crythli* pearls—and no trader had ever before been able to gather as many as half a dozen in one trading-season from the Krug. Some of those that Hale acquired were rather crudely pierced for stringing, but he was well over a millionaire in *crythli* pearls, already, and they'd only cost him a couple of weeks of research and a few hair-raising moments and a crime most men would queasily prefer not to commit. But it wasn't murder, because Krug hadn't yet been ruled human—under the laws forbidding homicide.

In her third week in the village, Miss Cummings witnessed a partial parallel to Hale's enterprise, though she didn't know it.

It began at daybreak, when she was wakened by the morning-noises. There were snickering, giggling noises from the jungle, which was only a hundred yards from the incomplete circle of maidens'-huts. There were boomings deeper in among the trees, and something honked discordantly, and something else made sounds as if of hysterical laughter. But Miss Cummings was used to such sounds now. They were commonplace. The noises that disturbed her were speech-sounds.

There were chitterings which were children—boys and females together. There were deeper, authoritative, firm notes which were those of matrons. There was a great congregation of the village near Miss Cummings' house.

She dressed herself and went out-of-doors. All the village was assembled in the center of the maidens'-huts ring. The unmarried-females were gathered together, and they fairly jittered with hopeful agitation. The Krug-children raced and scampered about a solemn group of the older females. Miss Cummings approached, with her communicator turned on and relaying everything to the tape-recorders on the ship. As she drew near, she saw that a *crythli* shell was being passed from hand to hand among the older matrons. They examined it with great care and extreme minuteness. They acted, indeed, like short-sighted alumnae caught without their eyeglasses and seeming rather to smell than to look at some interesting object.

The oldest, stoutest female—possessed of a preposterous number of offspring—seemed to debate a very long time. The maidens jittered

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more visibly than before. Then the oldest female solemnly handed the *crythli*-shell to one of them. The maiden clasped it to her breast with dramatic satisfaction. This particular young female stood out in Miss Cummings' mind because in a Kruggish way she resembled a frog-like undergraduate who'd infested one of Miss Cummings' classes at her woman's college on Earth. That undergraduate, with thick spectacles and buck teeth and an irritating personality, had been married the day after graduation to a millionaire. It had seemed injustice at the time. Now her Krug opposite number was plainly chosen for some splendid prize. The *crythli* shell, incidentally, would have fetched a good fifteen thousand credits in Venus City, and several times that on Earth.

A gabbling uproar rose, and the other maidens looked bitter over their contemporary's triumph. The matrons gathered about the chosen one, beaming at her. The Krug children burst into a run for the jungle. They vanished in its depths.

Miss Cummings fumed because all this was inexplicable and she couldn't ask the question, "Why?"

The morning passed. Miss Cummings, in her hut, conferred with her aides and superiors on the ship offshore. Whatever was coming, it was without precedent in this research. Therefore it must be important. She was urged not to miss any developments.

She went out as the village children returned from the jungle. They carried burdens. There were logs of the hollow, cane-like jungle-trees which broke off cleanly at their joints. They were of diverse lengths and thicknesses. Other children staggered under loads of jungle-leaves and vines and creepers. They marched to that part of the village where the kraal-like dwellings stood. They began to construct a new house.

This was as remarkable as anything else about the whole Krug culture. No adult supervised. No instructions were issued. The children swarmed about the enterprise like so many bees, and if Miss Cummings had not been engaged in getting barred from all the matrons and the frog-faced Krug girl, she would have gaped as the house went up. Because it was done perfectly. With a precision they could not possibly have learned, the Krug children heaved the feather-light logs into upright position without even a floor-plan scratched on the ground. They deftly flipped crosspieces into place and tied them with vines. They established a roofing framework in the same fashion and thatched it with absolute competence. Then they stuck limber saplings here and there and began matter-of-factly to thatch down the walls. In a matter of some four hours they had built a house indistinguishable from the kraal-like dwellings of the matrons, only

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with fewer rooms. But extra rooms could be added.

Having performed the work without instructions, they ceased it without being dismissed. Five minutes after it was done they were busy again with the normal and zestful and quite useless occupations of Krug childhood. And perhaps the most astonishing thing about the whole job was that there was neither anything lacking in the house nor any material left over. They'd brought back exactly enough.

It was too much for Miss Cummings to grasp. She was striving to gather information on what she considered more important matters. Barred from the society of the matrons, for today, she visited the other maidens in their huts. She found them occupied as usual. Some of them wove. Miss Cummings had shown them minor improvements in the process which improved their product, but they ignored her instructions. They used the cloth she'd partly woven, but they did not adopt her changes.

Miss Cummings chatted with them, subject to the limitations of the language. She could say "this cloth-is-good" or "I-come-to-visit-you." And they could agree. She could observe "the-house-is-becoming," meaning that it was being built. Which was similarly true. She could even say, and did say, "the-maiden-with-the-*crythli*-shell-is-not-where-we-are." They agreed to that, also. But Miss Cummings, bursting with scientific curiosity, could not ask why a new house had been built or where the *crythli* shell had come from or why it was presented to the frog-like maiden and what it signified. The language blocked all efforts.

Roy Hale could have told her, though. He was only two hundred miles away, then, and he now had three quarts of *crythli* pearls and did not even bother to own more than a few shells—though practically any shell was worth ten thousand credits in Venus City. He was a multi-multi-millionaire in *crythli* pearls, and still he planned to grow richer. He considered it humorous that there was no law forbidding his enterprise. It had not been defined that Krug were human, and therefore there was no penalty for killing them.

But to Miss Cummings the matter was still mystery. A *crythli* shell in the center of the maidens'-hut ring. The gift of the shell to the especially repulsive Krug girl. The building of a house. The complete withdrawal into privacy of the Krug maiden and all the matrons. Miss Cummings made wild guesses and waited for something to happen to solve the mystery.

She had to wait until evening—until the cloudbank overhead began faintly to dim, since there were no sunsets on Venus. The light was no more than halfway faded when the Krug girl came out of

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the newly built kraal-house. Miss Cummings saw her and fairly sputtered her excitement into the communicator.

The Krug girl sat down before the new house with an air of elaborate unconcern. Always, previously, she had worn the single crude cloth garment of her sister-maidens. Now she wore a quite special outfit of which Miss Cummings had had no inkling before. But being a woman she grasped its marvelousness and its meaning instantly. The Krug girl was dressed as a bride. But no human bride was ever arrayed in a headdress of *crythli* pearls which would have sold for millions on the Earth-market, nor wore necklaces of *crythli* pearls no mere millionaire could have hoped to buy, nor did any human bride ever wear armlets and belts and breast-plates of *crythli* shell, when a reasonably rich man's wife only hoped wistfully to own a single small shell disk.

Miss Cummings gasped the news into the communicator. She was about to witness, she said agitatedly, the marriage ceremony of the Krug. It must be! It was the more certain because there was no visible bridegroom!

The village gathered. Behind the gaudily decorated Krug girl the matrons of the village took their places. They were stout and bland and infinitely satisfied with themselves and all the world. They looked rather like an alumnae group posing for a photograph on their twentieth class reunion. As the cloudbank overhead became darker and darker and more nearly black, there was a hushed waiting atmosphere everywhere. The children appeared. They came filing out in a long line. The foremost—a Krug child barely toddling—carried a lighted torch with tremendous solicitude. The others carried things which might also be torches, but were unlighted. There was silence save for the noises of the nearby jungle. The cloudbank darkened and darkened, and presently it was truly night. There was no light anywhere in the village except the one small torch in the hands of a toddling Krug child. And nothing happened for a very long time.

Then came crisp, grunting commands from the oldest of the matrons. The small child reached its light to the next. A second torch flamed. That torch swung to a third, and that to a fourth, and so on until fifty flaring, sparkling flames furnished a brighter light than Miss Cummings had ever seen in the village after nightfall.

Then, and only then, she saw the bridegroom. In the darkness, guided by the first and only burning torch, the male Krug had crept into the village and to the new house. He had doubtless been perceived, but Th'Tark had undoubtedly ordained that a pretense of

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invisibility should rule until he stood before his bride.

Now he seemed to shrivel in the torchlight. He appeared at once desperately to wish to be anywhere else on the planet—in which he was like many human bridegrooms—and despairingly to be resigned to his fate. In the torchlight, seeming numbed in some fashion, he unburdened himself of *crythli* shells. He laid them down, one by one, before the adorned but stonily unresponsive maiden. Shell after shell to a fabulous value was piled before her. He actually laid down a full two dozen of the gleaming things. Most human girls would have grown starry-eyed if presented with a single one.

He straightened up. The torchlight glistened on his body. Miss Cummings had an impression that he sweated like a man in absolute terror and despair.

The most ancient of the matrons grunted.

The seated, decorated Krug-bride looked scornfully upon the despised male. But, very, very condescendingly, she rose. She faced him. Then she reached out her hand and with a sort of infinite and conscious generosity she touched him. Which act of abandoning aversion appeared to be the official climax of the wedding.

There was a clamor. The children dashed their torches to the ground and stamped on them. The village reverted to darkness. Miss Cummings heard rustlings all about her as if the inhabitants of the village returned to their homes, the ceremony over.

She made her own way to her own maidens'-circle hut and settled down zestfully for a long conference over the communicator. She reported the wedding with the enthusiasm and rapturous sentimentality of a lady society reporter at the wedding of a human heiress to an Earth-Council member. She gloated over the bride's costume. Being a woman she considered the relative insignificance of the bridegroom and his total lack of male attendants a right and proper thing. She was even sentimental about the symbolism of the bride's formally excepting this one male from her abhorrence of masculine creation.

Presently she calmed down enough to talk proper anthropological shop. The absence of other males from the village population remained odd, but there were references to analogous social customs on Earth. There was a Himalayan culture in which after marriage there was a honeymoon lasting only three days, when the bride and bridegroom separated for most of a year before setting up housekeeping together. There was an Indo-Chinese culture in which females affected to ignore the existence of males for an almost indefinite period, remaining in their parental home until the bride's par-

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ents insisted that their daughter's husband take over the support of his by-then-numerous offspring. There were many human customs suggested by this Krug wedding. There was enthusiastic anthropological shop-talk on the ether-waves of Venus, that night.

Next morning Miss Cummings happily noted that the bride appeared in her usual costume—with only a little more cloth added to it in token of her matronly status—and joined the matrons in their activities. She was addressed by a new honorific, and all the personal pronouns appropriate to an unmarried girl were now changed in her speech and in speech to her. But her husband did not appear at all. Miss Cummings had almost expected it.

There was one other interesting item. Miss Cummings got up at the break of day, but not in time to see the ornamentation of the mounded, rounded flower-bed now existing before the home of the new matron. It had quite two dozen *crythli* shells disposed about it, but of course the flowers were not yet established. They had been planted, though.

Miss Cummings and her aides on the ship discussed the matter exhaustively. The *crythli*-shell gift of the bridegroom had its parallel in bride-prices paid on Earth. There had possibly been an additional gift of pearls which Miss Cummings had not observed. The use of precious shells to decorate a flower-bed was conspicuous waste like the potlatch festivals of Alaskan Indians. The fact that the bride-gift was without utility-value resembled the old Bornean custom, in which an aspiring lover had to present a new-taken human head to his inamorata, for her to think him a good catch.

The village settled down again. The bride faithfully watered the plants in her shell-bordered flower-garden. She preened herself on her new status. But her husband remained invisible.

Miss Cummings practically forgot about him during the week that followed. A disturbing change in her own status was beginning to appear. She was taking up, now, the distribution of authority in the village, and discovered that the oldest of the matrons had begun to regard her with a disturbing disapproval.

The status of this pompous dowager was approximately that of headwoman of the village, yet the authority she exercised was not quite that of command. From time to time she gave what could be considered signals for community activity—for cultivating the soil, for repairing the community huts. Everybody worked at whatever she indicated was to be the activity for the day. But she gave no orders. Nobody asked for instructions. Everyone down to the smallest Krug child seemed to know per-

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fectly every duty that might be required. And conversation was strictly confined to observations of objective fact.

When Miss Cummings had been in the village for five weeks, she received a special call from this strutting and authoritative female. The matron-Krug came to Miss Cummings' maiden-hut and regarded her with disapproval. Her air was something like the aloof scorn with which an elderly married alumna, revisiting the college of her youth, looks upon a middle-aged and unmarried professor who seems unlikely to emulate the alumna's career. The stout lady Krug made two statements to Miss Cummings. The first one, the philologists on the ship decided, could be translated as meaning, "you-are-venerable-and-have-no-children." The second would be translated variously as *finish, end, termination,* or practically any word meaning finality. The Krug matron then formally handed Miss Cummings an odd pointed instrument made out of the only really hard wood to grow in the Krug Archipelago. And she waddled out of Miss Cummings' hut.

Miss Cummings, disturbed, transmitted a picture of the instrument to the survey-ship. The anthropological staff was able to determine that it was old, that it was sharp, and that it was enigmatic. Miss Cummings, however, had an intuition. She did not like it.

Here, Miss Cummings' instincts served her better than Ray Hale's methods of research. She could guess what it was for, and he could not. At this time he was less than seventy miles from Miss Cummings' island. He knew more about *crythli* pearls and shell than any other human being. But he didn't know about that instrument.

Miss Cummings guessed indignantly. The Krug were absolutely practical creatures. The most ancient matron had decided that Miss Cummings was too old to find a husband. So she had stated the fact and given Miss Cummings the sharp and nasty instrument so Miss Cummings could take appropriate action.

Miss Cummings furiously determined to do nothing of the kind. They couldn't make her commit suicide! But if she didn't carry out the instructions—obey the signal—do whatever obedience to the headwoman's observations would be—why . . . they might do it for her!

Miss Cummings raged privately. She might have to be withdrawn from her field investigation! Another female anthropologist might have to take over! It could mean that the definitive anthropological report on the Krug race-culture would be written by somebody else, and contain merely a falsely warm acknowledgement of her contribution to the study in a preface nobody would ever read!

Miss Cummings began to wear

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a chip on her shoulder. It seemed to her that the villagers regarded her with mild reproof for being alive. The most authoritative matron stopped her in the street and repeated her two statements—the one that meant she was venerable without children, and the one meaning finality. A day or so later, two other matrons repeated them. A day later still, and Miss Cummings found herself ostracized. Even the Krug maidens said coldly to her that she was venerable and had no children and—finality.

It was heart-breaking, and it was more than a little frightening. But also it was enraging. Miss Cummings felt that the Krug were her project! They belonged to her! She had learned their language! She had made complete evaluations of their technology and work-habits and the gradations of social prestige and had reported fully on their marriage-customs! She would not give them up!

She took to sleeping with the tiny, almost invisible hand-weapon under her head—so far as she managed to sleep at all. But after two days in which she was ignored by all the village, she slept from pure weariness and then was awakened by the usual morning-noises from the jungle. Only this morning she found herself sitting bolt upright, and frightened.

She heard voices. Krug voices. Her heart skipped beats. Perhaps this would be violence on the way. She'd been given the signal to commit suicide and she hadn't done it. Perhaps now she was to have forcible assistance. . . .

She peered out of her doorway, ready to give an emergency-signal for rescue by helicopters from the ship. There was a great congregation of the village in the center of the maidens'-circle of huts. Krug-children raced and scampered about. The maidens of the village fairly jittered with hopeful agitation. The congress of matrons examined a *crythli* shell. As before, they examined it in the matter of near-sighted alumnae caught without their glasses. As if they were smelling it.

Then the most ancient matron, the headwoman of the village, made grunting noises to the others. She marched firmly to the hut occupied by Miss Cummings. She presented the *crythli* shell. And Miss Cummings took it.

She explained the matter crisply to her associates on the survey-ship. She would expect, she said, to be picked up shortly after nightfall. She would give a suitable warning and advance estimate of the time. But this was a perfect opportunity to record the initiatory ceremonies preceding matrimony among the Krug. It could not be expected that anybody else would have the same chance. So, once the male Krug had appeared, she would expect helicopters to drop smoke-bombs, descend in their

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midst guided by aerial flares, and carry her away with the absolutely invaluable anthropological treasure of a Krug bridal outfit. In the meanwhile she was, of course, armed.

The children rushed into the jungle. They returned and began to build a house. Miss Cummings, herself, was taken in hand by the village matrons. She had her personal communicator turned on and during all the daylight hours it transmitted scientific anthropological data which sent the staff on the survey-ship into ecstasies. Much of it is still unintelligible, and nobody but another anthropologist would find any of it interesting. But it all got down on tape. For one thing, there was more detailed data about Th'Tark than anybody had dreamed existed, and Miss Cummings' claim to be *the* authority on the Krug was settled for all time.

There was just one curious omission in the staff's and Miss Cummings' reaction. It did not occur to them that Th'Tark might have arranged their triumph, as part of the business of keeping the Krug from being exterminated.

Presently the cloudbank began to shade slightly toward a darker hue, and when it was distinctly gray Miss Cummings came out of the new kraal-type house that had been built for her prospective matronly estate. She wore the bridal costume of the village. And even Miss Cummings was almost overwhelmed by its richness. It was barbaric, of course. It was crude. But the luminous, changing colors of the pearl headdress and necklaces, and the incredible richness of the arm-bands and shell ornament gave her an extraordinary sensation.

The light faded still more, and the children disappeared, and presently the sky was black—and consequently all of the village—and then they returned, with the smallest child of all carrying a lighted torch while the others bore unlighted ones.

Miss Cummings sat in darkness, arrayed in wedding garb of a richness such as no human daughter of a sultan ever wore. There were the night-noises of the jungle. She murmured into her communicator. A reassuring voice spoke in her invisible ear-receiver. The copter rescue-party was ready. Besides, she had her small hand-weapon in case of need. She was not even faintly timid, now. The data obtained today had made her scientific reputation permanent. From now on she would be secure in the fame of being the first truly great authority on the race-culture of the Krug of the Summer Sea on Venus. With that splendor in mind, she could not be afraid. And after five weeks and more in a Krug village she could assuredly not be frightened by any mere male!

There was a single, flickering torch some fifty yards away, solicitously held by the smallest ambu-

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latory Krug child. There was a waiting, breathless silence for a very long time.

Then a voice panted words in Kruggish speech. A matron grunted. The child with the lighted torch passed the flame to another. The lighting spread. There were fifty flaming torches in the village night.

And Miss Cummings looked with dazed, and shocked, and wholly incredulous eyes at Ray Hale.

He was smeared with pigments to enhance the Kruglikeness of the human race. He bore a burden of *crythli* shell. He looked at her, and his eyes widened with shock. Then sweat poured out on his skin in the torchlight. He knew her not only as a human woman, but as herself—and he was the one person she unfeignedly and by long habit hated past all considerations of charity.

He swallowed, and then panted:

"Play up! Or we'll both be killed!"

Miss Cummings caught her breath. He said more shrilly:

"Play up, I tell you!"

Miss Cummings said unsteadily, with her voice a mere whisper:

"There are copters overhead. I've only to call them—"

Hale glared at her like a trapped wild beast. His desperation was so evident that Miss Cummings sensed a deep approval among the female Krug about her.

"You married my little sister," said Miss Cummings in a strange, toneless monotone. "She loved you, and you broke her heart. You beat her! You were everything that was vile to her—and she died when you left her because she loved you. I've prayed that death would strike you down! Oh, you beast-beast-beast—"

A murmur of admiration from the Krug matrons. At least, it seemed so. Hale sweated in the torchlight. He gabbled:

"They'll kill me if you don't play up! You too!"

It was a lie. Miss Cummings did not know how she knew, but she was fully aware that her behavior accorded with the ideal of Kruggish female scorn of all masculinity. The most proper of previous Krug maidens had never displayed such magnificent scorn for their bridegrooms. Miss Cummings was abstractedly aware that she would be the pattern of bridal propriety from now on.

Ray Hale put down a *crythli* shell. He trembled with his terror, but he went through the routine of matrimony among the Krug. Shell after lustrous shell, coiled, iridescent, color-changing beauty—he laid down the customary offering before Miss Cummings.

"I can let them kill you," she whispered, her throat taut. "They won't be punished. I can let them kill you as you should be killed—or I can call down the copters. . . ."

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There was a voice in her ears. The rescue-party overhead was ready to swoop down, but it was bewildered. They were waiting a summons for action. They heard highly improbable human speech where nothing of the sort should be. The voice asked anxious questions. Miss Cummings recovered herself.

"Something unexpected has developed," she said in a level voice for her communicator to send aloft. "I find that I am perfectly safe. I am confident that I will not need to be rescued. But make sure that all the recorders are ready for later data."

She flipped off the communicator-switch.

In the torchlight Ray Hale looked convincingly Kruglike and desperate and despairing as he ceased the putting-down of shell and stared at Miss Cummings with the air of a man who has heard his death sentence and waits for it to be carried out. He suddenly babbled:

"Here! Pearls! I'll give you all of them! Gallons of them! Anything—anything! But don't let them kill me. . . ."

He poured a double handful of *crythli* pearls into her lap. And Miss Cummings rose. She was ashen-white, and she hated Ray Hale as she had never hated any other human being. But she was also an anthropologist. And Hale could not possibly have undertaken this enterprise if he hadn't gathered scientific information Miss Cummings still lacked.

Her lips twisted themselves into the most mirthless and seemingly most scornful of smiles. Actually, it was a grimace of anguish. She reached out and touched him—with the muzzle of her almost-invisible handweapon.

"If you try to escape in the darkness," said Miss Cummings, "I will pull the trigger when I feel no pressure on this gun."

A child dashed a torch to the ground. Instantly all the spouting flames were rolling in the earth and small Krug children were stamping on them. Miss Cummings shepherded Hale into the kraal-house that had been built that day for her.

"I think," she said thinly, "you have information I lack. I shall turn on my communicator, now, and you will tell all you know about the Krug. It will be recorded for study. Then I will decide whether to kill you or not."

She stood beside him in the darkness. He gasped. She prodded him with questions—and with the weapon.

The weapon was part of Miss Cummings' equipment. It was very small, and it fired electronically, and when the slack on the trigger was taken up it necessarily emitted microwave radiation. The fact was very useful on Earth. It made the illicit use of weapons impractical, because armed officers arrived

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within minutes anywhere the trigger-slack of a weapon was taken up, and this worked out nicely for law-abiding citizens, but not so well for the lawless. On Venus the same fact kept non-terrestrials from making use of human weapons without permission. But for Miss Cummings, the important thing was that the emission of radiation from an electronic weapon was accompanied by a high-pitched humming sound.

Hale heard the thin drone of the pistol, and knew that Miss Cummings had only to tighten her finger ever so slightly to end his life. The sound meant that she was ready and willing to do it.

He whimpered. He was in a very great hurry to leave the bridal dwelling. He'd meant to remain there only minutes. But he did not dare to say why. When Miss Cummings asked him questions in a thinly level voice, he babbled an almost incoherent excuse for trying to go through the Krug marriage ceremony with a Krug female. But Miss Cummings wore the *crythli*-pearl headdress. She stopped him.

The thin whining sound of the ready-for-firing weapon drove him frantic, in combination with his other reasons for fear. He panted the truth. He'd made the ceremonial offering of a *crythli* shell to the center of the circle of maidens' cottages. He'd known that a bride would be chosen and a kraal-house built. The instant he entered the dwelling he meant—he panted it—to knock the female unconscious and escape with the costume worth millions of credits on Earth.

"But," said Miss Cummings with the same thin steadiness, "you offered me gallons of pearls. How many times have you done this?"

He whimpered. He quivered with the need to flee. But she said as steadily and as deliberately as before:

"You would not risk only stunning the brides. You killed them, did you not? You strangled them?"

Hale babbled that the Krug were not human. It was not murder to kill them. And this was true—so far. Hale was mad to get away from the village now. Miss Cummings considered that he was fearful of a copter coming to pick him up as a criminal.

"Nobody will come from the ship unless I call them," she said with a sort of unearthly reasonableness. "It would spoil my research project for a copter to land in the village. But my sister died because she loved you. If you wish to live, you will tell me . . ."

What followed was one of the most peculiar data-gathering interviews in the history of anthropology. With his own reasons for desperate and headlong flight urging him, and the whine of the taut-triggered weapon holding him still, Hale tried—stumbling over his words in his haste—to answer all Miss Cummings chose to ask. He

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did not even try to lie. He gabbled in his effort to satisfy her scientific curiosity in the shortest possible time. He trembled. He shook. Presently his breathing was only gasps. But she was inexorable. She held consultations with the ship to clarify what other questions she should ask. She reflected, and phrased her questions with precision. And all the time the weapon whined softly, ready to destroy Hale if he tried to flee.

It was an excellent interview, though. Miss Cummings got a full picture of the male side of the marriage-custom story, which no trader had been able to do. Male Krug were despised. But to marry they had to gather *crythli* shells. Preferably those bearing pearls. Tending to grow incoherent in his haste, Hale told her where the *crythli* shells were found and how they had to be acquired. Only a Krug would do it, and a Krug wouldn't do it for money. It had to be the stark necessity which drove a Krug to marriage. . . .

"I've got to get away from here!" panted Hale shrilly. "I can't stay here! I can't—I can't—"

Miss Cummings said thinly:

"I shall remain in the village a few days more to gather the data needed to complete what I know now. It would be inconvenient to have your body here. So I do not kill you. Go!"

She drew back the muzzle of the weapon, but it still whined faintly. She was aware of exhaustion, now. She'd remained standing and terribly tense for a length of time she didn't realize. Actually it was to be measured in hours. Only an anthropologist could have done it, and only then to gather information there would be no second chance to procure. Miss Cummings felt herself wilting as Hale sprang away from her and dived desperately into the blackness outside the kraal-house door.

But, weary as she was, she burst incontinently into sobs. She had been very, very fond of the sister whom Hale had married fifteen years before and who had died of her love for him. Miss Cummings wept exhaustedly. She was too exhausted even to try to muffle her sobbing.

But this, as it happened, was considered suitable behavior in a new matron. Among the Krug a new-wedded bride weeps loudly when her brand new husband makes his way back into the darkness from which he came. It is, in a way, a signal of his departure. Also, it covers any sounds that may be made outside.

As in this case.

When Miss Cummings appeared in public, next morning, she was saluted with the honorific pronouns she rated as a married lady Krug. She was regarded with complete approval, and in a matter of four days more she had gathered absolutely all the information the

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Krug female language could convey in the absence of a word for *why*. She felt only one minor disappointment as an anthropologist. It was that she did not take part in the making of the mound-like flower-bed she found before her kraal-house in the morning, nor in its decoration with the *crythli* shell that Hale had set out in the torchlight. Even the flowers were planted for her. But she watered them dutifully.

Before the week was out she went back to the ship, to the stark amazement of the Krug. In time she wrote a book about the Krug culture which brought her eminence among anthropologists and is still the standard work. Incidentally, her book prevented the extermination of the Krug by revealing where the *crythli* mollusks grow and how they have to be obtained. Humans do not attempt to gather them. They still leave that to the Krug. But it is now the custom to purchase the decorative shells from Krug villages when a kraal-house is torn down because of the demise of the lady Krug who lived in it. Then the *crythli* shells have no more significance to the Krug, and they part with them readily for a fair price in quinine. Which, of course, means that the supply of *crythli* shell is steady but moderate and the price remains stable—which is good for interplanetary trade. Sometimes a few pearls are purchased, too.

And this may possibly have been the reason for the whole affair. Th'Tark could have arranged it. If there is a Th'Tark, this could be the explanation. But one has doubts.

The most recent editions of Miss Cummings' book have a three-page appendix added to them. The three pages add little of importance to the anthropological side of her work, but they do complete the biology. They report recent discoveries that once a Krug maiden becomes a matron, she produces offspring with a fine regularity for all the rest of her life, though she never sees her husband again. Biologists tend to speak of Krug males as "drones," nowadays, by analogy with honey-bees and ants, whose males like the Krug are driven from the communities of working females, and who die after their mating. And philologists put a word in, too, arguing that since the Krug language is incapable of expressing the operations of logic, there is no evidence that the Krug think in concepts—*i.e.*, that they are reasoning beings. And the biologists join in zestfully to point out that the Krug technology and symbiosis with vegetation is certainly no more complex than that of the leaf-cutter ants. Other myrmidae and some kinds of bees and wasps approach it, too. Altogether, they make out quite a case.

The anthropologists consider that they have the last word, though. They point out triumphantly that

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the Krug must be considered human because there is no other case, among irrational animals, of social participation in a marriage rite. And especially, they point out, no other non-human creature engages in any sort of funerary activity. But the Krug do have a marriage ceremony. It is elaborate. They have a socially recognized honeymoon, during which the bride and her new husband are alone in the new home built for the bride, and during which for a matter of hours every other Krug returns to her own dwelling and the privacy of the wedded pair is absolute. Even the end of the honeymoon is no less officially recognized, because after a fixed interval—of as much as four hours—the Krug matrons gather about the hut again. When the new Krug bridegroom flees his new wife's hut he is met by this committee of mated females. And they dispatch him very dexterously with a sharp wooden instrument and bury him in a neat mound before his widow's door and ornament the mound with *crythli* shells. And afterward his widow dutifully waters the flowers that are planted there.

This, the anthropologists say, is human behavior.

It is not settled yet. Maybe Hale could throw some light upon the question. He knew a great deal about the Krug. Even in his frantic haste to tell all he knew, it took hours for Miss Cummings to exhaust her list of questions and the secondary questions suggested by his replies. Maybe he did know more than she learned from him, because she couldn't but be affected by his frantic anxiety to be gone. But nobody knows how much Hale had found out. He has never been seen since his Krug-wedding night, on Venus or elsewhere.

Maybe the only way to find out the facts would be to ask Th'Tark, who could, just possibly, have arranged the whole affair. It prevented the extermination of the Krug by the march of progress. Th'Tark would have wanted to bring that about, certainly.

If there is or was a Th'Tark.

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That I am in love with Mildred Clingerman is, I fear, the worst-kept secret in science fiction publishing; but I still feel I'm on safe editorial ground since my devotion is shared (as your letters indicate) by so many readers and by other, and possibly more impersonal, editors. Here is a Clingerman story that won the hearts of the editors of Woman's Home Companion *shortly before the regrettable demise of that long-respected magazine—a warm and gay story of magic in a quiet residential neighborhood, with a child-heroine who is all too literally bewitching.*

The Little Witch of Elm Street

by MILDRED CLINGERMAN

NINA HIT OUR NEIGHBORHOOD HARD. Of course we'd been warned, but for the first day or two we found it impossible to believe that such a beautiful child could be seven kinds of unmitigated hell. My first introduction to Nina came one day late in the spring. I was visiting Mrs. Pritchett, who lives next door. I'd made the mistake of telling Mrs. Pritchett that I never seemed to get caught up on my housework. She insisted that I come right over to see just how she organized her day. I never could resist expert demonstrations. Every year at the county fair I buy little kitchen thingumbobs that look perfectly easy to operate. Under my hand, though, they turn into Awful Mysteries.

For two hours I'd been watching Mrs. Pritchett squaring corners and quieting ruffled surfaces and in every room obliterating evidence that Mr. Pritchett or any living thing had ever passed that way. Poor Mr. Pritchett, I thought. On Elm Street Mrs. Pritchett's living room was referred to as "the living reproach"—to the rest of us. Neither Mr. Pritchett nor the Pritchett infant was allowed to impede the smooth progress of her day. All of Mrs. Pritchett's days clicked and purred, turning out nice square little compartments labeled "cleaning," "baking," "baby," "marketing." In the nursery I watched her bend over the baby's pram and tuck in another half inch of blanket on the right hand side. This exactly centered the knot of blue-ribbon trimming under Master Pritchett's chins.

Master Pritchett, himself, re-

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mained inert, except for the slow blinking of his eyelids. After seven and one half months of perfect, ordered existence the Pritchett infant had taken on the exact look and deportment of a justice of a superior court. Mrs. Pritchett wheeled him out to the sunny porch and left him to his judicial contemplation of a world that might, or might not, show cause.

I recalled how my own children at that age had screamed for attention. Just the same, I thought, they didn't in the least resemble stuffed sausages. Back in the living room Mrs. Pritchett was lifting the taut sofa cushions and narrowly inspecting the crevices along the sofa arms. Once, two years ago, she told me, she'd found an orange seed buried there—damning proof, I gathered, that in her brief absences Mr. Pritchett's besetting sin still twitched in him. I was glad to hear it. He would eat oranges in the living room, she said, though he no longer piled the ashtrays high with orange peels. He couldn't. Mrs. Pritchett had made him stop smoking and removed the ashtrays. Poor Mr. Pritchett.

Even expert demonstrations pall, especially when accompanied by little lectures in miniature, calculated to imbue me with the Pritchett Housekeeping Doctrine, which I knew very well was as alien to me as Druidic rites, and about as likely to be put into practice. I was ready to go when the doorbell rang.

Two figures confronted us. One was a thin, spectacled girl of about twelve, whose hair straggled out of careless braids to hang curtain-like over her high forehead. She maintained a firm hold on a leather leash which was attached to a four-year-old beauty, a dimpled dumpling in a blue pinafore. The dumpling's smile was enchanting. Here, I thought, is perfection. One simply overlooked the fact that the tiny girl's elbows were bandaged (so were both knees) and that a yellow-and-green bruise lay like a slap along one round cheek.

The older girl blew at a bothersome strand of hair and wrapped another loop of the leash around her arm.

"This," she said, pointing to the Vision, "is Nina. We've just moved into that new house in the next block and I'm calling on all the neighbors to warn them—it's only fair. Especially those with children."

She peered curiously past the astonished Mrs. Pritchett into the Pritchett living room.

"Mind if I come in? It's quite safe, really. It's a new leash, you see, and in any case Nina has a thing about me. She always has had. Isn't it lucky? But of course," she said, "I can't be with her constantly. There's school and all. . . . That's what I'd like to explain to you if I may? Thank you, we'd love to come in."

Mrs. Pritchett and I fell back be-

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fore this determined advance. I sat down again. The morning began to look like fun.

"What a neat room!" the child said. "Is the whole house like this? You must have a compulsion or something. I know all about the beastly subconscious, you see. My brother, *her* father," she jerked the leash indicating Nina, "is a professor at the University. By the way, my name is Garnet Bayard." She stuck out a rather dirty little hand first to Mrs. Pritchett, then to me. The handshake was quick and down, as the French do it. She seated herself composedly in the best chair, with the radiant Nina leaning against her bony knees.

"It's this way," she said, bending confidentially toward us. "Nina expresses her aggressions very readily without any regard for painful consequences. For herself, I mean. Hence the bandages. Naturally she doesn't care how painful the consequences are for her victim. They—that is, her parents and the psychiatrist—believe that this is simply a phase and that it is up to them to try to provide her with 'inanimate objects' to vent her aggressions on. Personally, I've grown a little bored with this phase. I've been with my brother and his wife since Nina's birth and, frankly, she was ever thus. I loathe sounding reactionary but until psychiatry becomes more of a science"—Garnet lifted her eyebrows and shrugged her shoulders—"one may as well resort to witchcraft. As a matter of fact, I find the study of witchcraft a fascinating one. My brother has a very nice collection of old books on the subject—"

But Mrs. Pritchett, whose mouth had been opening and closing without any sounds emerging, finally found her voice.

"I don't understand. What was it you came to . . . *warn* us of?"

Garnet looked at her in surprise. "Why, I came to warn you about Nina. She bites. She kicks. She pinches babies. She aims her tricycle at the behinds of nice old ladies and never misses the target. She's hell on wheels." Garnet turned to smile at me. "I am addicted to plays on words. I think even bad puns are delightful, don't you?"

Mrs. Pritchett was sputtering. "You . . . you mean she attacks people without any provocation? What are her parents thinking of? Have they no control over her at all?"

"They've got me," Garnet said, "and the leash. As to what they're thinking, does one ever know? About anybody, I mean. Pamela—Nina's mother—is lying down at this moment reading Proust. One would suppose reading Proust would set her to dithering around in half-forgotten, somewhat mucky old impressions. What it actually does to Pamela is put her to sleep. She's rather tired with the moving, and the sight of all those un-unpacked boxes and barrels simply

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drove her to Proust. It's that kind of day."

Mrs. Pritchett, I saw, had reached the hand-wringing stage. "But what do you expect us—the neighbors—to do about it?"

Garnet studied her for a moment and then spoke soothingly.

"About Nina? Nothing, except for keeping your gate closed and latched. And when you're out walking look behind you frequently. She's amazingly quiet when approaching her prey."

It was almost lunchtime. I had to run along, much as I hated to, but I went away cherishing the picture of Mrs. Pritchett's face as she listened to Garnet in horrified fascination. Mrs. Pritchett's eyes, I thought, looked as if she were suddenly confronted by far, disorderly vistas. I decided this was an even nicer spring than usual. Of course, our neighborhood wasn't exactly dull before Nina's and Garnet's arrival, but there wasn't much scope for righteous indignation. True, we women always reacted when the Pritchetts were mentioned. Some of us clucked our tongues and some of us grinned, but we all joined in the chorus to murmur, "Poor Mr. Pritchett . . ." Living next door to them, I saw a good deal more than most. Like Mrs. Pritchett sweeping the front walk right behind Mr. Pritchett every morning as he left the house, as if she were determined to erase his irresolute footsteps. I could hear her delivering firm lectures—not miniature ones, either—yet I had never once heard Mr. Pritchett answer back.

At parties I'd heard ribald speculations as to just how Master Pritchett happened. They had been childless for the six or seven years of their marriage, and when Mrs. P. began to appear in neat, dark maternity dresses some of the gayer couples insisted she was about to deliver herself of New Man—a robot-like creature somewhat resembling an efficiency expert, but minus vocal cords.

I'm afraid we were all disappointed that the baby hadn't upset the rigid routine of that household. Some of the women had begun to say, "Yes, but wait till he starts walking or trying to feed himself!" As for me, I had no such hopes. I was certain Mrs. Pritchett was more than a match for her son. I had watched the slow metamorphosis in Mr. Pritchett. He hadn't always been an object of half-scornful pity to his neighbors. Years ago he had exchanged books with me and sometimes a few words at twilight, standing on his neat patch of lawn, gazing wistfully at our toy-littered yard, tumbling children, cats and dogs. We talked then of beer and pigeons and amateur painting in oils. He was fond of all three but Mrs. Pritchett banned them as "messy." He said lovely, unexpected things sometimes, like the evening I told him about my struggles to measure

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our windows correctly for new curtains. I had tried it four times, I told him, and the inches came out exasperatingly different each time.

"Yes," he smiled at me warmly, "there's something queer about measuring tapes. I believe they hate us, and sometimes they can't resist making fools of us—for being so silly as to imagine we can tame even a small chunk of space or fence it in."

I went inside my house and looked at my measuring tape with new eyes. Mr. Pritchett's words only served to deepen my own conviction that the world was a fearful and wonderful place, and that in it anything could happen and the very best thing for me to do was to stay limber enough to enjoy it.

I harbored the uncharitable wish that Nina's first attack would be on Mrs. P. but the initial assault, unhappily, was directed toward my own two children. While I bandaged and soothed, the story emerged between sobs. Nina had ridden them down on her "trike" while they were kneeling unaware, playing marbles. The severest injury, I saw, was to their pride. It was unthinkable that a four-year-old girl should dare assail boys of eight and ten. And, by George, she wouldn't catch them that way again. The sobbing stopped while they showed each other just how they'd show her. Here I stepped in to separate them before they forgot that this was a mere demonstration and to point out how extreme my scorn would be if they ever stooped to fighting a four-year-old girl.

"But what'll we do?" they wailed. "You want us just to lie down and let her ride that old trike all over us? Be smashed to smithereens?"

I remembered Garnet's words. "Keep looking behind you. If you see her coming, get out of the way. Run!"

I got nothing but rebellious looks for this advice but in two weeks it was standard operating procedure for every child in the neighborhood and for most of the adults. The adults who didn't use evasive tactics soon learned to. She bit the postman on the thumb, hanging on like a terrier. She butted fat Mr. Simpson in the belly. Twice. She broke up every knot of children she found by pedaling furiously into their midst. I became accustomed to the sound of terrified shrieks and pounding feet. I knew Nina had appeared on the block. And throughout all the commotion and blood, Nina kept smiling her entrancing smile. We mothers began to long for summer when school would be dismissed and Garnet could take full charge.

We all agreed that Nina suffered as many injuries as anybody. More, really. I rarely saw her when she wasn't swathed in bandages. She

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didn't talk much, even in Garnet's care, and of course nobody paused to converse with her otherwise. We hesitated to call on her parents, since some of the first callers had been a little put off by the Bayards' reception of them. Nina's mother, I heard, was a languid woman who lived in a welter of books and dust and who, at the mention of Nina's crimes, either bristled or laughed heartily. Professor Bayard's laughter at his daughter was rather hollow and it was remarked that he had several bruises on his shins. That was one of the things that made the callers uncomfortable: the professor at home wore nothing but a pair of shorts and one or two of the older ladies disliked the sight of his peaked, naked little chest. And the talk, they said, was like nothing they'd ever heard before. Very erudite, but also full of very strong Anglo-Saxon words. I thought the Bayards sounded like fun, but I was too busy just then to seek them out.

And anyway Garnet sought me out often enough to keep me informed about the Bayards, though mostly, to my delight, her talk ranged farther afield. Nina was never a menace when Garnet brought her. She sat playing with the boys' outgrown toys and picture books, the perfect picture, herself. I was charmed. Garnet, however, pointed out that even bulldozers occasionally run out of gas.

Garnet's talk had much the same effect on me that Mr. Pritchett's once had. I recognized the fact that she was some kind of genius and might one day startle the world with her originality and fire. But at twelve she was content to startle me—her quick mind grasping, sorting, and discarding, her tongue curling around new words she'd just learned, framing her newest thoughts in mint condition. I liked her because she was interested in almost everything: people, cats, pies, stars, or the way to scrub a floor. I just this minute realized that Garnet, all along, was meant to be a poet. There was a time, though, when I saw her as retributive justice or just plain witch.

It began—this period—the day Garnet came rushing in to tell me that she had finally, in her study of witchcraft, discovered a possible cure for Nina.

"I am convinced," she said, "that she is, in old-fashioned terminology, harboring a devil. Why not? Isn't that what the psychiatrist is trying to lure out of her with his little dolls and toy furniture? He gives them to her so she'll build a world in miniature and then react to it, while he watches. She reacts, all right. Smash. Crash. But why? He could have come over here and watched her in this one for all he's learned. Do you know what our bill for bandages alone amounts to? She'll kill herself if we don't do

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something quick." Garnet pushed excitedly at her hair. "Why, any day now she may begin attacking people in automobiles.

"I have to get back. I left Pamela at her eternal bandaging. No, Nina hasn't attacked anybody today. Not yet. Pam and I decided last week that Nina adores being bandaged. . . . She'd just intercepted a man on a bicycle and afterwards she apparently felt she rated an extra big bandage, though all she needed was a small piece of tape. *How* she howled! So we're experimenting—wrapping her like a mummy several times a day. I haven't much faith in it, and Nina keeps protesting there isn't any 'red.' Have you got a bottle of ketchup? We don't keep it on hand. Pamela thinks people who eat ketchup ought to be cast into outer darkness, but I like it. . . ."

I found a bottle of ketchup and humbly passed it on to Garnet.

"I hope you're on the track of her trouble," I said. "This bandage idea sounds good to me. Maybe she hurts herself so her mother will fuss over her."

Garnet shook her head impatiently. "That's too simple," she said. "Besides it's too utterly dull. By the way, I need a few . . . uh . . . herbs. For the spell, you know—the exorcism. I've been collecting stuff for two days now, and what a pile of junk. Have you got any rosemary? Good. I'll take some of those poppy seeds, too. I haven't told Pam about this witchcraft thing. My brother wouldn't care, I know. He'd laugh. But Pam can be very primitive-mother about Nina at times. You'd be surprised. They're going to a faculty party tonight, so just as soon as I wave them on their way, I'm going to set the scene and do the deed."

I was alarmed. "Garnet! You're sure you won't hurt her? You aren't going to feed Nina any queer messes or potions?"

"Of course not. I'm simply going to seat her in the middle of a chalked pentacle and then work my abracadabra. Actually, I'm combining three different spells—just the best features of each." She turned to go, then hesitated. "The thing is, you aren't likely to be in the vicinity of our house this evening, are you? It has occurred to me that Nina's devil might hunt for another host. The book doesn't say anything about that. Just to be on the safe side, why don't you keep your family in the house between seven and seven thirty P.M.?"

I promised and Garnet left.

As the witching half-hour approached that evening I felt a little nervous. I believe I half-expected the sound of a great explosion, followed by a mushroom-shaped cloud.

It wasn't till a little after eight o'clock that I received the first hint that Nina's devil had perhaps found a new host, though neither Garnet nor I can ever be certain.

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Garnet phoned me immediately after her "ceremony."

"Of course it worked. Nina was sitting there calmly trying to mash her fingers with her rubber hammer, smiling like an angel. I was dashing around rather madly, you know, lighting incense, waving my hands and chanting, flinging little bags of herbs hither and yon, when suddenly the blinds on the big picture window fell with a dreadful clatter. Nina began to scream like crazy. I felt a little shaky, myself, but all the lights were on and I still had a few details to attend to. Nina kept screaming her piercing screams and drumming her heels on the floor—a perfect devil's tattoo. Just as I finished the spell, somebody rang the doorbell. When I answered it Mr. Pritchett dashed over and picked up Nina before I could explain anything. He was passing by, you see, and heard her screaming and was afraid she'd hurt herself again.

"He couldn't help seeing me through the window and I guess he thought I'd panicked or something. But, listen . . . the thing is, Nina stopped crying *immediately,* and she hugged him instead of kicking him . . . and, well, Mr. Pritchett was breathing hard and looking rather pale, so I offered him a drink of Pam's gin and he took it! Not only that, when he left just now he was murmuring something about beer and pigeons and every man's right to express himself! Now, really, what do you think?"

When I hung up, I thought, Poor Mr. Pritchett—one drink of gin bringing out all those stifled little loves. I felt so sad I left the warm peacefulness of our lived-in living room and went out back to look at the stars. After a while I was sure I heard Mr. Pritchett singing a rollicking drinking song and was astonished to see him standing in his kitchen doorway, pitching empty beer cans out into the darkness. Behind him I could see Mrs. Pritchett clutching her chest, her mouth open, her voice silent.

Of course, Elm Street these days isn't exactly dull. But there's no longer much scope for righteous indignation. Some of us cluck our tongues over that mischievous Pritchett boy and some of us grin. And there are people, I hear, who object to Mr. Pritchett's pigeons as a messy nuisance, but I like to see them wheeling against the sky.

Yesterday when I ran over to see poor Mrs. Pritchett for a moment, I found the living room ashtrays (as usual) full of orange peels. There was an empty beer can on the floor, too, half hidden by the ruffle on the easy chair. But there was also a new look in Mrs. Pritchett's eyes, as if she was contemplating some long, exciting vista and finding she rather liked it.

"Mr. Pritchett," she told me proudly, "has just received an im-

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portant promotion. I'm not a bit surprised—he's such a forceful man!"

The Bayards, I'm sorry to say, have moved away. The bandage idea must have worked its magic on Nina, or perhaps it was the psychiatrist. The people around here still miss her. There isn't, after all, so much beauty in the world that one grows resigned to parting with it, particularly when it's accompanied, as it was these last few years, by Nina's kind of sweetness.

But it's Garnet I miss most. So stout of heart, so original and altogether delightful. Though there was a time when I looked on her with a feeling akin to fear. For who wants retributive justice loose in his neighborhood, or even a witch?

We Move on Turning Stone

We move on turning stone
Through the dark-bright of space,
Lighted by lonely sun
And the moon's known face.

We turn up every stone
Hoping to find some bright-
Ness in the dark. Alone
We seek an unknown light.

Darkly we turn our face
To suns and moons unknown;
We seek through lonely space
For brightness not in stone.

Lonely in unknown space,
Hopeful of dark or bright,
We seek in every face,
We turn towards any light.

LEAH BODINE DRAKE

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Previous Richard Wilson stories in F&SF have been tender (Love, *June, 1952), funny* (Don't Fence Me In, *April, 1956) or frightening* (Lonely Road, *September, 1956). His latest is less classifiable, especially in advance—but when you've finished it you'll know a great deal about Mr. Wilson's full-time profession . . . and you'll have received some singular and suggestive hints concerning wodibles, yervi, the worship of Orchana-Tu, and the dissues of the Lower Gorb.*

QRM

by RICHARD WILSON

THERE USED TO BE SOMETHING IN the news business known as the summer doldrums. I don't know what's become of them. There certainly wasn't any shortage of news on the night of July 17, 1956. There was a backlog of copy on my desk, waiting to be processed. Nancy Corelli, the operator, had a basketful that I'd already penciled up. It was going off to London as fast as the RTT could handle it, which was only sixty words a minute.

Nancy, a slender pretty brunette who unfortunately happens to be married, was punching away like a demon, cussing a little in Italian, when the operator on the incoming side, across the room, yelled:

"London says ZFB, Nan. ZST from 671."

Maybe I'd better define a few terms, in case you're not familiar with news agency jargon.

To put first things first, a news agency is an outfit like AP or UP or Reuters or, in my case, World Wide. RTT is *radio teletype*. At World Wide it's an ordinary teletype that transmits copy along a land line to Press Wireless, Inc. (Prewi for short), which then beams the impulses across the Atlantic to London, where they come out again as words on a teletype.

ZFB means *fading badly* and ZST means *slips twice*—in other words, send all copy twice in succession. This is because atmospherics are getting at the copy, garbling it. If it's sent twice, the chances are the garbles won't be in exactly the same places and the story can be deciphered.

So what London was telling us, here in New York, was that our copy had been OK up to number 670 but that they needed repeats

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on everything after that to help them make it out.

Nancy pulled the tape back about ten numbers to 671 and asked me:

"You want me to go on punching, Sam, or wait till we're caught up?"

I'm Sam Kent, night editor at World Wide.

"Let it catch up," I said. "Who knows, we may have a snap."

AP and UP have bulletins. Reuters and WW have snaps. Same thing.

"In that case I'll go out to the little girl's room and powder my nose."

While Nancy was gone, Bart, the operator on the receiving end of the RTT from London, said:

"It's starting to break up here, too, Sam."

Bart made out a message from London just before the RTT was washed out completely. It said:

ZSU LAST RECEIVED 670 RELYING CABLES

ZSU means *slips unreadable*. I told Nancy when she got back. "Put on a belt," I said, "and ask Prewi what gives."

A belt is a length of perforated tape, glued into a circle, which goes through the transmitter and sends on the RTT, over and over, a series of lines that look like this:

QRA QRA DE WFK40 WFK40 VIA PREWI/NY RYRYRYRYRYRYRYRY QRA QRA DE WFK40 WFK40 VIA PREWI/NY RYRYRYRY RYRYRYRYRY

They're the call letters for the radio frequency assigned to WW by the FCC and when London can read them again they send us a ZOK. Then we take the belt off and start sending copy again.

Nancy hung up the phone, which is a direct line, and told me:

"Prewi doesn't know what's wrong. They're trying to run it down. Anything you want cabled?"

I thought about it. WW was in the throes of one of its economy drives and a story had to be pretty hot to warrant cabling. The last London received was 670. That was the story about Miss Israel refusing to pose with Miss Germany at the Miss Universe contest at Long Beach. "Old antagonisms flared tonight . . ." was what our west coast stringer had led with. Good stuff.

671 was a rehash of the Clare Boothe Luce arsenic poisoning story. That could wait.

672 was the Dodgers losing again, this time in Cincinnati, and Duke Snider getting into a rhubarb with a fan. The English couldn't care less, but London sent the scores back on its beam to Bermuda where, for some reason, they're baseball crazy. The Dodgers could wait, too.

673 was no clues in the Weinberger kidnaping. A negative story, unfortunately. No urgency on that one.

674 was the curtainraiser on four-year-old Mike Sibole, who was to lose his left eye the next day in an

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operation. He'd already lost his right eye in a surgical attempt to arrest cancer of the retina. I'd cable that one later if the RTT wasn't restored.

"Nothing worth cabling now," I told Nancy. I went back to penciling up some copy, dutifully inserting the *u*'s and changing the zeds to esses in words like *color* and *authorization,* to conform with British English.

Nancy's phone rang and Prewi told her they were getting QRM on our frequency from an unidentified station and that there was no other frequency available for us at the moment. QRM is interference.

"They're working on it," Nancy said.

"OK. Take a break."

She opened her copy of *House and Garden* and I started a fresheners on the steel strike. The belt went round and round, printing line after line of WFK40's.

Then the belt stopped. Sometimes it will do that. The glue holding the two ends of the tape comes loose and the little posts in the transmitter hit a blank on the tape instead of the perforations and the machine stops. Nancy put down her magazine and took out the loop to examine it.

It seemed to be all right and she was about to put it back when the RTT started clicking.

"That's funny," Nancy said. "I'm not sending."

Copy was appearing on the roll of paper in the teletype. It *was* odd because ours is a sending-only circuit. London's traffic to us came in on the receiving-only machines at Bart's side of the room.

"Maybe Prewi put a test belt on," I said. They could do that, to check circuit trouble.

"That's no test belt. Look at it."

It certainly wasn't. It was in the form of a news story but its form was the only thing about it that made sense.

It said:

IVST, RARN, 803 YAVI (URP)—MIYALLO NEEN PRAX, FUTURE REGENT OF RARN, WAS BORN WITHOUT VARIANCE TODAY, AS FORETOLD IN THE ANNALS OF ADUMBRATION. THERE WAS GENERAL REJOICING. DURGO HAK PRAX, THE PRESENT REGENT, COMMENTED: "GOOD. NOW I CAN PREPARE FOR ELDER STEWARDSHIP."

"Madonna!" said Nancy.

"Urp," I said, looking over her shoulder. "What the hell is Urp?"

"Maybe it should be UP. I'll ask Prewi if they've got our wires crossed with United's."

"UP doesn't use Press Wireless," I said. "Besides, what kind of dateline is that? UP has stringers in some of the damnedest places, but who ever heard of Ivst, Rarn?"

"What's 803 Yavi?"

"What it is I can't imagine, but where it is is where the date would be, just before the logo. If that is a logo—Urp."

"You sound like you've got gas. I'll get Prewi on it anyway." She picked up her phone.

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"No, wait. Another one's coming. Let's see what it says."

This is what it said:

ESTEDDIS, O.D.K., 803 YAVI (URP)—ESTEDDIS SHREDDED VISITING BLASHTI 647 TO 5 TODAY IN A VARIANCE-FILLED THRILLER AT GLERE OVAL AND MOVED TO THE CHALLENGE STAGE OF THE TERTIARY GRIADS.

"Urp." Nancy said it this time.

"And 803 Yavi. That much is consistent. But where the hell is Esteddis?"

"In O.D.K., obviously. Is that one of the Canadian provinces, like P.E.I.?"

"No. And what they're talking about isn't ice hockey, either."

"Here comes another one."

We watched it. Bart wandered over from the incoming side, took a look and said, "What the hell? Who's sending?"

"The RTT's haunted," Nancy told him. "We're getting a ghost station."

"Somebody's kidding around," Bart said. "Some wise guy at Prewi."

"I don't think so. They don't kid like that."

The latest story was the shortest so far:

BLECH, 803 YAVI (URP)—A WAVE OF SELLING SWEPT THE WODIBLE MARKET TODAY BEFORE A VARIANCE WAS TRACED AND A RETROACTIVITY RULING NULLIFIED LOSSES.

"It's a market report," Bart said. "They trade in wodibles. But where's Blech?"

"Exactly," Nancy said. "And what are wodibles? *You're* a big help. Sam, remember that story we had from Ohio a couple of weeks ago? About the astronomer who was getting radio signals from Venus? Maybe that's what this is."

"Nuts," I said. "I think Bart's right. Somebody at Prewi's horsing around. Call 'em up. We've got copy to move."

She picked up the phone, then put it back in its cradle while she watched the newest item print itself on the machine:

HEARI
LICH, VASZ, 803 YAVI (URP)—J J J J J J J

"It's a snap," Nancy said. "Only they call it a hear. It must be pretty big—the operator's so excited he forgot to hit the figure key for the bells."

The bell on the teletype is the upper-case J.

"Something big on Venus, eh?" I said to Nancy. "Like maybe the sun coming out?"

"Why not Venus? Lich, Vasz, certainly isn't in Massachusetts."

Whoever was sending found the bell key, finally, and rang it a few times, then went on with the item:

. . . THE MURANDER WORKS AT ONCH EXPLODED WITH A VENUS-SHAKING ROAR TODAY . . .

"It *is* Venus!" Nancy shrieked.

. . . AND FIRST REPORTS SAID 43 YERVI WHO HAD BEEN CONDUCTING SECRET LOCHASA RESEARCH WERE FEARED KILLED. THE EXPLOSION CAME WITHOUT WARNING AT THE VARIANCE-PRONE INSTALLATION NEAR LICH.

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"You see! You see!" Nancy was bouncing in her chair. "It is Venus! I told you!"

"Or else somebody with a powerful imagination," I said. "Get Prewi on the phone and see who's doing it."

"OK, skeptical Sam. OK." She talked to somebody at the other end, then announced: "Nobody's doing it."

"Of course somebody is. Tell them to look at their monitor."

She spoke to Prewi again, then said: "They don't have a monitor on."

"Isn't that just fine? Well, will you ask them to be so kind as to put one on, if it's not too goddam much trouble? *Madonna!*"

Nancy giggled and relayed my message, censoring it.

Meanwhile our friend Urp, the phantom usurper of our RTT, was carrying on in fine fettle, switching from dateline to dateline like an alien Walter Winchell.

URDI-UM-FEEB 803 YAVI (URP)—THE 44 NAMES OF ORCHANA-TU WERE RECITED IN SOLEMN GORTEMIS TODAY BY 44 YOF FROM KLEMP. 44,000 VARIANCE-FREE NOVANTIA IN TRADITIONAL SKON CROWDED THE OOS.

"I just had a horrible thought," I said. "Is this stuff all going to London?"

"I guess so," Nancy said. "If it's coming out here I don't see why they wouldn't be getting it, too."

"Oh, great! They'll think we're drunk."

KRON, 803 YAVI (URP)—A DISSUE TO CONTINUE FUNDS FOR BI-LINGUAL DIFFUSION MET OPPOSITION FROM THE ECONOMY BLOC IN THE LOWER GORB TODAY. SNEEM, A YOUNGER FROM ERST, K.V.R., DECLARED THAT THE COST OF MAINTAINING THE AUTOMATIC TRANSLATOR WAS BOTH PROHIBITIVE AND A COMPLETE WASTE.

HE FOR ONE FOUND IT DISTASTEFUL TO BE SUBJECTED TO WHAT HE CALLED "THAT BARBAROUS GUTTURALITY, ENGLISH" EVERY TIME HIS TUNER DRIFTED.

SNEEM SAID HE APPRECIATED THE SCHOLARLY ASPECTS OF STUDYING THE CHIEF LANGUAGE OF THE ONE OTHER KNOWN INHABITED PLANET IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM BUT ASKED WHY SCHOLARSHIP WAS NOT LIMITED TO SCHOLARS INSTEAD OF BEING INFLICTED ON THE ENTIRE POPULATION.

SPEAKER DITCHIE INTERRUPTED TO SAY THERE WERE SECURITY REASONS FOR THE DIFFUSION WITH WHICH SNEEM MIGHT NOT BE FAMILIAR. SNEEM THEN MOVED FOR A CLOSED HEARING.

"NOW WE'RE GETTING SOMEWHERE," SNEEM COMMENTED.

"So that's why their stuff is in English," I said.

"Getting less skeptical, aren't you?" Nancy said. "They're having a hot appropriations debate in their Congress, just like we do. Only they call it the Gorb."

"I admit the homey details enhance its credibility," I said. "Their automatic translator would seem to be more powerful than they know. And Earth's signals must be pretty strong, if they've learned English."

"Don't forget that astronomer in Ohio. He got Venus, too."

"He's a radio astronomer. There's a difference. And he only got signals, not messages."

"Of course not. He probably didn't have a teletype."

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"Hm," I said. It sounded logical.

"I wonder about those security reasons they shut that fellow Sneem up with," Nancy said, rereading the dispatch from Kron, which presumably was the capital city. "Sounds ominous."

"Let's not get *too* dramatic, Nancy."

"No? Where do you stop?"

A machine behind us began to chatter and produced a cable from London:

40248 EXTRAFFIC WFK40 GOOD SIGNAL BUT CONSIDERABLE QRM EXUNIDENTIFIED STATION LAST RECEIVED 670 RELYING CABLES

"They're getting it, too," Nancy said.

"They're getting something. But if they can read it they're being pretty phlegmatic about it."

"That's only Traffic. The Second Coming wouldn't excite them. Anything you want cabled?"

"No, thanks. We'll ride it out a while longer. It can't last forever."

"No? Here they come again."

ALIENS OUT

KRON, 803 YAVI (URP)—PREPARATIONS FOR NULLIFICATION OF THE EARTH MENACE RECEIVED A SETBACK TODAY WITH THE EXPLOSION OF THE MURANDER WORKS AT ONCH. ELDERS SAID THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WORKS ITSELF, THOUGH SERIOUS, AND THE PRESUMED LOSS OF A SUPPLY OF LOCHASA WERE LESS DISTRESSING THAN THE REPORTED DEATH OF THE 43 YERVI.

CONCENTRATION OF SCARCE YERVI IN ONE WORKS CAME UNDER RENEWED CRITICISM IN THE UPPER GORB AND ELDER BLANG IMMEDIATELY PROPOSED A DISSUE TO LIMIT THEIR NUMBER AT ANY CRITICAL FACILITY TO SIX. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE EARTH NULLIFICATION PROGRAM REQUIRED

BUST BUST BUST

KILL KILL KILL

ATTENTION ALL DIFFUSERS: KILL KRON ITEM ON PREPARATIONS FOR NULLIFICATION. A KILL IS MANDATORY

URP/ESTEDDIS

Bells accompanying the kill rang for a full half minute.

"Oh-oh," Nancy said. "Some Urp forgot to throw the switch. There'll be hell to pay in their head office."

I knew what she meant. The item had been distinctly slugged "Aliens Out" and should never have been put on the beam. It must have been like AP's "NYC Out," which means the AP, having picked up an item from one New York paper, throws a switch on the teletype circuit so the item doesn't go out to competing papers.

Presumably URP's radiocasts in English were for home consumption only, to indoctrinate the Venusians. It's always useful to know your enemy's language. The "Aliens Out" slug probably was no more than a precaution; there had been no hint in URP's account of the appropriations fight in the Lower Gorb that the Venusians knew their radiocasts were piercing their cloud blanket and reaching Earth.

Nor was there any hint that the average Venusian—the man in the street in Kron, or Esteddis, or Urdi-um-Feeb—though exposed to the barbarous gutturalities of English, knew there was such a thing

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as an Earth menace or that the Youngers and Elders in his Gorb were secretly planning an interplanetary invasion.

All at once I was thoroughly convinced it was no joke. It was too authentically complicated to be the work of some character fooling around with a teletype.

All the evidence pointed to the likelihood that the leaders of an alien race were out to give Earth the business because we had newly become a menace.

I could imagine why they might think so—our atomics, our rockets, our artificial satellites were all leading to space flight, and before long our neighboring planets would be within range of our not-always-benevolent science.

"What do they mean by Earth nullification?" Nancy asked. "What's lochasa?"

I made the gesture of drawing my finger across my throat.

"You mean Venus is going to attack Earth?"

"It's an informed guess," I said. "All I know is what I read on their wire. The question is, what do we do about it? You believe it and I believe it, finally, but would anybody else?"

"Like the FBI, for instance?"

"Or the CIA. God knows it's no miserable little flying saucer sighting. We've got it in writing. And quadruplicate at that. Better save all four RTT copies—*and* the carbon paper. Has Prewi got a monitor on yet? They'd be another witness."

Nancy picked up her phone to Press Wireless and I made my decision. I dialed Operator on my desk phone and asked for the Central Intelligence Agency.

They had a man in the office four minutes after I hung up. He had been working in the building for years—I recognized him as Jonesie, one of our more literate night elevator operators. I don't know why he'd been planted there unless the CIA figured any building so full of international press services and foreign correspondents might also contain a spy.

Jonesie—the name was highly inappropriate now as I watched him go to work—looked at the Urp copy, took notes from Nancy, Bart and me, talked to Prewi on the phone, checked back with Washington and then stared at the now-silent RTT.

"Was that Kron item they killed the last one you received?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," Nancy said, still a bit awed by the transformation of Jonesie, humble elevator operator, into Jones, secret agent. "It's as if they got panicky and pulled the switch to cut everybody out."

Then she jumped as the RTT started up again.

We waited tensely to see what it would say. But all we got were foxes:

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THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER A LAZY DOG'S BACK 1234567890 PW SENDING

It was Press Wireless running a test belt.

Presently Nancy's phone rang and Prewi told her she was back on the air to London.

She shrugged and sorted through her old tape to number 671.

"Well," she asked me, "shall I put it in?"

I shrugged and turned to Jones. He shrugged too, but said decisively, "Go ahead. I'd say we've got all we can hope for here."

Nancy put the tape in the transmitter and ordinary old U.S. copy began flowing again:

W671
ARSENIC ONE (EXKENT)
NEW YORK, JULY 17 (WW)—A PAINT INDUSTRY SPOKESMAN AND A GOVERNMENT CHEMIST DIFFERED TODAY ON WHETHER IT WAS POSSIBLE FOR AMBASSADOR CLARE BOOTHE LUCE TO HAVE BEEN POISONED BY ARSENIC PARTICLES FLAKING OFF PAINT ON HER BEDROOM CEILING IN ROME AND INTO HER MORNING COFFEE. . . .

A few minutes later we got a cable from London saying:

40402 EXTRAFFIC WFK40 QRM ENDED ZOK ZSO CEASE CABLES

"Blasé bunch," I said. "Not a word about Urp. Or," I turned to Jones, "about whether your opposite number is investigating from that end."

Jones chose to be dense. "I beg your pardon?" he said.

"MI5," I said. "British Intelligence. They must be looking into it, too."

"Must they?" he said. He gathered papers together, leaving us one of the four copies of the Urp stories and giving me a receipt for the rest.

He was just as noncommittal with Nancy when she asked if the CIA knew of any other communications from Venus, or whether there'd been any previous suspicion of an interplanetary invasion.

Jones merely smiled and said, "Good night. Thank you for your cooperation. I'm afraid I won't be seeing you in the elevator any more." And he was gone.

Bart's and Nancy's relief operators came in. Nancy paused at the door on her way to the subway.

"Jonesie—I mean Jones—didn't swear us to secrecy," she said. "Isn't that funny?"

He hadn't, come to think of it. "I guess he was being realistic," I said. "Anyway, who'd believe us?"

"I guess that's right. I'm beginning to doubt it already. *Madonna!* Good night, Sam."

"Good night, Nan. Pleasant dreams."

Charlie Price, the overnight editor, came in to relieve me at 1 A.M. He had on the gloomy face he wore whenever the Dodgers lost.

"Baseball's all cleaned up," I told him, avoiding particulars so as not to rub it in. "Nothing's hanging, but you might keep an eye on the

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steel strike. There could be a leak about a settlement."

"The air OK?" Charlie asked, meaning were we running ZOK to London.

"Oh, some QRM washed us out for an hour or two but we're restored now. Some other station got mixed up on our frequency and we were getting their copy for a while. Prewi straightened it out." I nodded knowingly.

I didn't feel like going all through it with Charlie.

"Same thing happened to me a couple of years ago," he said. "France Presse copy started coming in on our machine. Couldn't make head or tail out of it. All in French."

"This wasn't quite the same thing," I said. "I left a memo for the dayside under the basket. You'll see it."

He shrugged.

"I'll look at it later. As long as the air's OK again."

"It's OK. Good night, Charlie." I wondered how he'd react to the memo. "Everything's OK, I guess."

I hope it is.

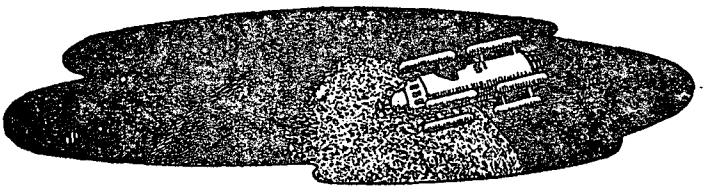
That was six months ago. The CIA hasn't said a word to me since that night. There's been nothing from London, either, even in WW's confidential correspondence, to hint that Britain's MI5 is unduly alarmed. I guess things are under control.

Even so, I take an acuter interest in the state of our military preparedness now. I'm an obsessive reader of everything I can find about progress in guided missiles and high-altitude rockets and I'm an advocate of bigger and better artificial satellites, preferably armed to the teeth.

And when I drive home at night I look up into the sky quite often.

But of course if you were to ask me I'd never admit I was looking for a ship full of yervi bringing lochasa from Onch.

Madonna!



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Last August Isaac Asimov published in Chemical and Engineering News *what strikes me as a highly important article. With vigor, indignation and maturity, Dr. Asimov analyzes one of the great clichés of the American Way of Life and reveals a cultural value of science fiction which you (like me) may well have overlooked hitherto. The original article was of course addressed, somewhat defensively, to scientists and technicians who might be unfamiliar with s.f.; the author has revised it for its appearance here, and added a special postscript for F&SF readers.*

The By-Product of Science Fiction

by ISAAC ASIMOV

ON JUNE 25, 1956, I WATCHED *Producer's Showcase* on television and witnessed, in striking form, the conflict between the Need for Education and the Cult of Ignorance.

The Need for Education was brought home with the very first commercial, which pulled no punches. The sponsor, it seemed, needed missile engineers and he set about luring such engineers to his Florida factory. He stressed the climate and the beaches, the good working conditions, the cheap and excellent housing, the munificent pay, the rapid advancement, the solid security. He did not even require experience. The effect was such that I myself felt the impulse to run, not walk, to the nearest airport and board a plane for Florida.

Having overcome that impulse, and having brooded for half a moment on the shortage of engineers and technical men brought on by the ever-intensifying technological character of our civilization, I prepared to enjoy the play being presented, which was an adaptation of *Happy Birthday* by Anita Loos, starring Betty Field and Barry Nelson. I *did* enjoy it; it was an excellent play—but, behold, the sponsor, who a moment before was on his knees, pleading for technically trained men, paid to have the following presented to his audience of millions:

Barry Nelson is a bank clerk

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who spends much of his free time in a bar because that is where one meets women (as he explains). The one setting is the bar itself and the cast of characters is a wonderfully picaresque group of disreputables with hearts of tarnished gold. Barry Nelson, in the course of the play, explains that he doesn't read books (he is talking to a librarian) although, he admits with seeming embarrassment, he once did. He explains that his father once paid him a sum of money to learn to recite the Books of the Minor Prophets of the Bible and to show he can still do it, he rattles them off, explaining that when he was younger he could recite them much more quickly. Thus, the audience is presented with an example of what book learning is, and it is clear to them that this sort of thing is useless and ridiculous and that Barry is wise to eschew books and confine himself to bars.

Betty Field, on the other hand, is a librarian: that is, an educated girl, since she implies, now and then, that she has read books. She is shy, corroded with unhappiness, and, of course, unnoticed by boys. In the play, she violates the teetotalling habits of a lifetime and takes a drink, then another, then another. . . . Slowly, she is stripped of her inhibitions. The stigma of intelligence is removed, layer by layer, as she descends into a rococo alcoholism. The result is that the barflies, who earlier viewed her with deep suspicion, end by making a heroine of her; her alcoholic father, who beat her earlier, takes her to his heart; and, best of all, the bank clerk, who had never noticed her earlier, makes violent love to her.

I repeat, I enjoyed it thoroughly. And yet, viewed in the sober gray light of the morning hangover after, the play preached a great American stereotype: that only in ignorance can happiness be found; that education is stuffy and leads to missing much of the happiness of life.

Is there some connection between this and the fact that the sponsor is having trouble finding technically trained men? Yes, we need technicians. Society as a whole needs them or it will collapse under the weight of its own machines. But how are we trying to get them?

Is it sufficient for an industrial concern to lure missile engineers? What it amounts to is that engineers are being lured from one specialty into another, with the total number seriously short. If a community can get rich by taking in one another's washing, this sort of thing can work, but otherwise, not.

Other solutions have been suggested. Men advise that science teachers be paid more, that bright students be give scholarships, that industrial chemists and engineers devote time to teaching and so on.

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All these points are valuable, but do any of them go far enough? And if you did, somehow, get a sufficiency of wonderfully expert science teachers, whom would they teach? A group of students, most of whom have been indoctrinated from childhood on with a thoroughgoing belief in the limitations of educated people and the worthiness of natural ignorance.

Think for yourself of the literary stereotypes of the "bad boy"—the best of whom were Tom Sawyer and Penrod Schofield (a more modern example is Henry Aldrich). School is their enemy; schoolteachers hateful; book learning a bore and delusion. And who are the villains of the piece? The Sid Sawyers and Georgie Bassetts —little sneaks who wear clean clothes, speak correct English, and like school (loathesome creatures).

I have never stolen an apple from a neighbor's apple tree or rifled a watermelon from his watermelon patch (there being little or no opportunity to do so in the depths of Brooklyn) but I thoroughly detested the villainous teacher's pets who wouldn't engage in such lovable and manly little pranks, or who wouldn't play hooky and lie about it, or participate in a hundred and one other delightful bits of what we today call juvenile delinquency.

Perhaps it is our pioneer background, when school seemed merely a device to take a boy from his necessary chores and put him to work learning Latin verb declensions, to the thorough exasperation of his overworked father. Whatever it was, many of us can remember the scorn heaped by the newspapers on the "fuzzy-minded professors" of the Brain Trust of early New Deal days. And more recently, there are those who seriously suggest that one of the factors in Stevenson's smashing defeat of 1952 was that, in his public speeches, he was so incautious as to reveal unmistakable signs of intelligence.

Have you ever noticed the role played by spectacles in movies and television? Glasses in the popular visual arts of today are the symbol of developed intellect (presumably because of the belief on the part of the average man that educated men ruin their eyes through overindulgence in the pernicious and unhealthy habit of reading). Ordinarily, the hero and heroine of a movie or television play do not wear glasses. Occasionally, though, the hero is an architect or a chemist and must wear glasses to prove he has gone to college. In this case, he is constantly whipping them off at every forceful speech he makes. True, he puts them on to read a piece of a print, but then off they shoot again, as he bunches his jaw muscles and assumes the more popular role of unpedantic valor.

An even better example is a Hollywood cliché that has been so effi-

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ciently ground to dust by over-use that even Hollywood dare not use it again (an almost incredible state of affairs). The cliché to which I refer is the one whereby it is assumed that Betty Grable, with glasses on, is ugly.

This has happened over and over again. Betty Grable (or Marilyn Monroe or Jane Russell) is a librarian or a schoolteacher (the two feminine occupations that, by Hollywood convention, guarantee spinsterhood and unhappiness) and naturally she wears big, tortoise-shell glasses (the most intellectual type) to indicate the fact.

Now to any functional male in the audience, the sight of Betty Grable, or similar female, in glasses evokes a reaction in no way different from the sight of her without glasses. Yet to the distorted view of the actor playing the hero of the film, Betty-Grable-in-glasses is plain. At some point in the picture, a kindly female friend of Betty Grable, who knows the facts of life, removes Betty's glasses. It turns out, suddenly, that she can see perfectly well without them, and our hero falls violently in love with the now beautiful Betty and there is a perfectly glorious finale.

Is there a person alive so obtuse as not to see that (*a*) the presence of glasses in no way ruined Betty's looks and that our hero must be perfectly aware of that, and (*b*) that if Betty were wearing glasses for any sensible reason, removing them would cause her to kiss the wrong male since she probably would be unable to tell one face from another without them?

No, the glasses are not literally glasses. They are merely a symbol, a symbol of intelligence. The audience is taught two things: (*a*) Evidence of extensive education is a social hindrance and causes unhappiness; (*b*) Formal education is unnecessary, can be minimized at will, and the resulting limited intellectual development leads to happiness.

It is this stereotype of good human ignorance versus dry, unworldly education that we must somehow fight and conquer if we are ever to get a sufficient quantity of raw material—that is, children who are brought up to respect and admire intelligence—upon which to apply the palliatives we suggest (money, security, prestige) to increase our supply of scientists and technicians.

The battle is not entirely one-sided, of course. *The $64,0000 Question* has taught us that under rare conditions it is profitable to know a good deal about Shakespeare. The Tomorrowland programs put out by Disney and the Mr. Wizard shows are examples of what television can do. Worth-while books appear even in paperbacks, side by side with the most unlikely companions.

What seems most important to me, however, is that there is one

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entire branch of popular literature which is largely given over to the proposition that brains are respectable.

That branch is, of course, science fiction.

Even the most primitive forms of science fiction—e.g., the version of the commodity that is purveyed by Hollywood—show this.

The rash of science fiction movies that deal with papier-mâché monsters and young men and women who display their scientific proclivities by whipping glasses on and off are nothing much, but even here is some attempt to value intelligence. The scientist stands (however Hollywoodishly jut-jawed) between the terrors of papier-mâché and the cowering peoples of Earth. He is not, as in most non-science-fiction movies that feature him, merely a humorous figure who speaks in long words and betrays a comic and nearsighted innocence when confronted with the statistics of the baseball season. Much the same can be said even for comic magazine science fiction.

Science fiction at its worthiest and most intelligent, as found in most of the magazines devoted to the genre, deals, in varying degrees of literary excellence and scientific accuracy (both on occasion, gratifyingly high), with life in societies more technologically advanced than our own, and takes the matter quite seriously.

Naturally, a science fiction story can be entirely frivolous, as for instance would be the case of a story dealing with a man who invents a device whereby he may unobtrusively see through walls and clothing. It should be obvious that, properly handled, a great deal of enjoyable ribaldry may result, but nothing much beyond that. A science fiction story can even be anti-science, as were a great many, several years ago, which described atom-shattered Earths with scattered and primitive survivors, all yielding the pretty obvious moral that all this would not have happened if only men had avoided poking their nose into science and had stayed close to the simple things of life.

But a significant fraction of science fiction stories have as their chief motivating force some kind of technical problem, and as their chief characters, technically trained people.

I can cite some examples. One deals with a party of scientists who travel to a distant planet to find the reason for the mass-death of an earlier colonizing party despite the planet's apparently ideal nature as a home for man. The answer turns out to be that the planet's crust is high in beryllium compounds and death is the result of insidious beryllium poisoning.

The second story deals with the efforts of a historian to gain permission to use the government's

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"time-viewing" machine in order to gain data on ancient Carthage. On the government's refusal, he engages the services of a physicist to build him such a machine—with totally unexpected and tragic results.

In the first story, there is a consideration of the problem of the expanding quantity of scientific data and the increasing realization of the inability of the human mind to cope with even a fraction of it. In the second, there is a description of what might take place in a society where government grants become the sole financial support of research.

This sort of thing is, as you see, a step above *The Monster from Twenty Thousand Fathoms.*

But both the story itself and the sociological background are, in a way, less important than the mere fact that although the individual scientist in such stories may be hero or villain (depending on whether he is intelligent and reader-sympathetic or intelligent and reader-unsympathetic), science and intelligence, themselves, as abstract forces, are represented sympathetically. Scientific research is presented, almost invariably, as an exciting and thrilling process; its usual ends as both good in themselves and good for mankind; its heroes as intelligent people to be admired and respected.

Naturally, science fiction writers do not deliberately go about doing this. If they did it deliberately, the chances are that their stories would play second fiddle to their propaganda and prove quite unpublishable; or if published, quite boring, and thus do more harm than good.

It merely happens that this sort of thing comes about almost unwittingly. However much a science fiction writer may think primarily of writing a good story and secondarily of making an honest living, he inevitably finds that every so often he cannot escape making intelligence, education, even a scientific career, attractive. *That* is the by-product of science fiction.

It is false snobbery, then, to affect to despise science fiction and to cite as excuse the more childish versions of it produced by Hollywood and the comic magazines. It may not appeal to the individual scientist as personal reading matter, but to ignore or revile it for that reason, is to ignore or revile an ally in that sector of the field where our enemy, the cult of ignorance, is strongest.

I can only wish that even more technologically trained people were interested in sceince fiction and that even more tried to write it, if only to raise the quality of the field and make it still more efficient as one means of recruiting future scientists. The armed forces frequently interest themselves in motion pictures dealing with the services in order that technical details be

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correctly presented and that military traditions not be made to appear ridiculous. It seems not too unreasonable to hope that some day scientists as a group will be presented with reasonable accuracy. Why not see to it that the alchemical retort is removed from the movie version of the chemistry laboratory and that the notion be discouraged that a nuclear physicist prepares a new type of atomic bomb by mixing water and dry ice in a test tube and staring earnestly at the mysterious smoky bubbles that result?

A specific example of what I am trying to prove is illustrated by a letter from Steven R. Miller of Flushing, N. Y., to John W. Campbell, Jr., editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* (which, of all the science fiction magazines, is the most technical in content). The letter read, in part:

"I feel I owe you and *Astounding* a great deal. Unknowingly, your magazine in particular, and science fiction in general, have been a great influence in the shaping of my life. The credit is due mainly to the articles that appear regularly in *ASF,* and to your editorials. I have just won a scholarship to the University of Chicago and I will take up biochemistry or, more likely, biopsychology. . . ."

In my profession, I help teach medical students every year, but these are young men who have already chosen their vocation. These young men have been won for science long before I see them.

By way of my spare-time occupation as science fiction writer, however, I now have evidence that occasionally I help to win the initial victory and encourage a youngster to go into science who might otherwise not do so. Extrapolate this to science fiction in general and think of the many youths who are won silently and who do not bother to advertise the victory. It is then that the writing of science fiction becomes more than merely a pleasant way to add to my income.

Thus ends Dr. Asimov's epistle to the Gentiles. The following addendum is addressed more specifically to you chosen readers of s.f.

Notice that I term the recruiting function of science fiction a *by-product.* I would like to stress for the present audience that I believe the *primary* function of science fiction, like that of all fiction, to be that of stimulating an emotional response within the reader. If science fiction, for some reason, failed to interest young readers in science, that would be too bad, but it would not necessarily be fatal to science fiction as a branch of literature. If, however, science fiction failed to arouse an emotional response in its readers, it would be dead . . . and so would its by-products.

I make this point because there are science fiction readers who

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would make science fiction the complete handmaiden of science: nothing more. One man reacted to the above article by writing an indignant letter to *Chemical and Engineering News* which included the following passages:

"Science fiction in its early years was definitely termed 'sugar-coated science' but this idea was disowned by the lazier writers of a later period who covered their scientific sins with the cliché of literary license. The writers of science fiction are in the main literary, not technical people. . . . If science fiction is to be an effective ally in the good fight for the increase of knowledge it will have to reorient itself completely from the messy pseudo-literary, nonscientific conglomeration it has become since World War II."

Alas, I appreciate the feelings out of which this indignation arises, and I imagine I know the type of science fiction magazine our friend would like to see. He wants a magazine that is *Popular Science* a month ahead of time, maybe two months, and one that is written in the same style except that the articles are broken up into alternate speeches made by two learned professors. . . . As for me, I'm just not with him.

Naturally, I like to see science fiction stories in which the science is valid. Nevertheless, if the story is a good *story,* then even if the science is a little off-key, it may *still* serve its purpose in interesting young people in science. The youngsters may have to unlearn a little when they actually come down to it (as I had to unlearn, with considerable discomfort, the "fact" that atoms are miniature solar systems) but that is not fatal. In short, bad science is a sin in science fiction, but it can be a venial sin.

On the other hand, stories with inadequate literary values are completely worthless, however excellent the science. The reason is simple: they are unlikely to be published; or, if published, unlikely to be read past the first page; or, if read through, unlikely to do anything but rouse intense boredom and antipathy in the reader and send him or her scurrying to safe haven in English Literature or Home Economics. In short, literary inadequacy is a sin in science fiction, and virtually always a mortal sin.

It is for this reason (and not laziness) that writers of science fiction are, *and will remain,* literary and not technical people. I hope, of course, that there may be an increasing number of science fiction writers who are both literary and technical, but even these (at least in their capacity as science fiction writers) must be literary men first and technical men only afterward.

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Bob Ottum is a Salt Lake City newspaperman whose first published fiction was Chirp Me a Story *(F&SF, August, 1955). His latest is an expression of the same dry, deadpan, offbeat humor, which should have particular appeal for one segment of readership: the men who happen (like author and editor) to like girls.*

The Girls on Channel N

by BOB OTTUM

TRINDLE DISCOVERED THE SECRET channel the day he stayed home from the agency with the sniffles and decided to fix the television set by himself. And when he did discover it, he thought it was a regular channel until he noticed the girls weren't wearing any clothes and that did it.

"Well," he said, and blew his nose. He pulled the armchair over in front of the set, plopped down in it and wiggled his toes.

The girls were writhing to the throbbing thump of native drums, bouncing and joggling against a backdrop of trees and jungle sky. He watched them until the scene dissolved and the camera did a dolly-up to a man seated at a desk. The man was wearing clothes and Trindle shrugged.

"Well, fellows," the man said, putting the tips of his fingers together in a little steeple, "that's the last dance for tonight. But there'll be more of the same tomorrow night at this same time . . ."

"I'll be here," Trindle said.

". . . and for the last time."

"Knew it couldn't last," Trindle sighed.

"The last time that is until after we make the switchover. Goodby for now." The man held his hand up, then put his little finger on the tip of his nose and touched his earlobe with his thumb. The camera dollied in tight for a shot as he looked out through his fingers. Then the picture went off.

Trindle sat and looked at the blank screen. Nothing happened. He blew his nose again, blinked, and looked around the apartment. Everything was the same: Newspapers scattered on the floor; briefcase open on the couch, spilling out the scripts to three shows he was trying to sell; his tool box open in front of the television set. He smelled the coffee perking in the

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kitchenette and got up automatically, walked in and turned it off. Dreamily, he poured himself a cup and stirred in some cream.

"Hell of a format," he said. He turned and looked over his shoulder into the living room, just to check. The screen was still blank. He drank the coffee without tasting it and poured another cup.

Trindle left the set turned on all night—just in case—and slept fitfully. Every half-hour he sluffed to the bedroom door and squinted at the screen. Still blank. In the morning he got up heavy-lidded and cursing, put on his bathrobe and sat down in the chair.

He watched all day, catching uneasy catnaps and blowing his nose.

The girls came back that night.

Trindle woke with a jump and looked at the screen. And there they were: arms linked like the Rockette Chorus, all high-kicking and joggling in unison. And all al fresco.

"I wonder what . . ."

The girls did a saucy little bump-and-grind.

". . . channel this is," he said.

Doing an off-to-Buffalo step, the girls bounced off into the wings and the picture did a dissolve to the man at the desk again. He touched his little finger to the tip of his nose, moved his hand around and put his thumb on his earlobe. Looking between his fingers, he said:

"Good evening."

"Good God," Trindle said. "I need a drink."

"Trindle." The man took his hand down. "Oh, Trindle, stay where you are so we can see you."

"Can you see me?" Trindle raised his eyebrows and pulled his bathrobe closed.

"Certainly. You can see *me,* can't you?"

"Yes."

"Well." The man shrugged.

Trindle jammed his hands deep into his pockets. "Just one little drink," he said. "I have in mind something like a brandy and soda. Now, don't go away."

"I won't. Don't *you,* either. I mean, don't do anything rash."

In the kitchenette, he pressed his thumb down on the spigot and watched the soda tumble the ice and brandy up to the top of the glass. He took a long drink, cleared his throat and added more brandy. He held the glass up, looked at it for color and added a little more.

"Trindle." It was the voice from the front room. "Oh, Trindle."

He looked over his shoulder. "One minute," he said. Then: "Ummm, you are *sure* you can see me?"

"Yes," said the voice from the screen.

"That's what I thought you said." Trindle uncorked the bottle again and added another splash of brandy. And swirling the ice in the glass, he walked back into the

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living room and stood in front of the set. "I just suppose that if I were to mix up another drink and bring it in here, we could do the sleight-of-hand bit and you could join me in a tall one."

"No," the man said. "This thing isn't really that far along yet. However, we *do* expect to have some sort of arrangement like that very soon. Thanks, anyway."

"Not at all." Trindle sat down and sipped his drink. "Ummmm," he said. "Well . . ."

"You seem to have found us out."

"So I have."

They looked at each other.

"I sort of like that bit with the fingers and the pinky," Trindle said. "Some sort of secret signal or something?"

"Mmmmm, yes, you might call it that. Really, it's more like a salute. Like . . . ah, shaking hands and all that."

Trindle shrugged.

"Now, look." The face on the screen frowned. "This is *really* quite fantastic. I mean, your discovering us and all that. It's certainly not the sort of thing we had planned at all. How . . . ah, how on *earth* did you find us out?"

Trindle finished drinking deeply and let the ice cubes slide down the length of the glass and bounce against his upper lip. Lowering the glass, he looked over the rim at the man on the screen.

"Matter of fact, I don't quite know myself," he said. "You can't sell air time with a runny nose so I stayed home. I got on a little do-it-yourself kick and jiggled the tubes and tightened a few things. Then I turned on the set and there you . . . well, there the girls were."

"Hmmmmm," the man said.

"Hmmmmm is right," said Trindle.

"Uh . . . lovely girls." The man didn't look at Trindle, but inspected his fingernails.

"Indeed. And so natural, too."

"Well, *we* think so. There's something so . . . so . . ."

"Lyrical? Poetic, engaging, jiggly, devastating, or maybe gamin?"

"Thank you," the man said. "Something so *lyrical* about the unclothed girl."

"Mind if I mix another drink?" Trindle waved the empty glass. "I hate not being able to offer you one and all that, but . . ."

"Perfectly all right, old boy."

He walked back in from the kitchen holding the bottle by the neck. He plopped back down in the chair and pulled out the cork with his teeth. Then he drank a long one from the bottle. "Free style," he said to the man on the screen. "Now, where were we?"

"Yes," the man said. He put the tips of his fingers together again and looked academic. "*Really*, I'm afraid we must get down to business."

"Wonderful," Trindle said. "And I'm sure I can sell your show."

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"Sell the sh—oh, *really*, that's quite funny! Sell the show. I'm afraid you don't understand. You see—"

"Look!" Trindle sat up straight in the chair. He squinted. "I can see it right now: We'll get a big underwear manufacturer—wait, let me rephrase that. We'll get a big manufacturer of underwear and do scanties spots between the production numbers. You know, tender girls in lacy little stuff; maybe that black background and one baby spotlight . . ."

"Scanties." The man took a deep breath. He tugged his tie loose and unbuttoned his collar. "Red satin, perhaps. Just a wisp of filmy little . . . or maybe a frothy . . . *Wait!* I say, dammit, Trindle, you've gotten me off the track. I mean, after all, you really *don't* understand. This thing just isn't for sale."

"But I do understand. I do. Selling television time is my line; hell, I'm the top man in the agency. Now, look: You're all upset because I've stumbled on your deal. Sure, you've got a secret channel here and a mystic high-sign and all that jazz. But, after all, I'm not going to the authorities. I'm with you." Trindle took another long one out of the bottle. He swallowed and smiled.

The man got up from the desk, walked around in front and leaned against it. He folded his arms.

"Your confidence is heartening," he said. "And that sponsor idea"—he sighed—"is just grand. But the . . . the *show*, as you call it, just isn't going to be on that long."

"I shouldn't imagine," Trindle said. "The cost is far too prohibitive to keep it on sustaining. But with money in the till . . ."

The man held up his hand.

"I really suppose I had better explain. Of course, it's frightfully unfortunate you stumbled onto us as you did. But I'm afraid nothing can be done about that **now.**"

"Well, how about a drink, for one thing?"

"By all means."

Trindle walked into the kitchenette and pulled down a new bottle of brandy from the cupboard. He pulled the cork out with his teeth and blew it into the sink. "Really a shame you can't join me," he called out. "A real old shame-o-rooney." He drank to it and walked back into the front room. "Now. You were saying?"

"You have a most amazing propensity for brandy for one thing. However, I digress. You see, **there'll** be no more show after Sunday. Tomorrow night, that is. In fact, one might say there won't be much of anything after tomorrow night."

Trindle lowered the bottle and squinted at the man.

"Pity to see the thing fold," he said. "And I, for one, will mourn. Frankly, I think we've got a thing here that could push the Mickey Mouse Club right off the old Hooper-pooper. And I could have saved you."

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"Thank you for your spirit, Mr. Trindle." The man bowed.

Trindle bowed back.

"As I was saying: There will be no more show. And to explain it further, there will be no more girls. You see, Trindle, we're not from your sphere—"

"I should say not. Anyone who would wear a suit with a belt in the back is not from my sphere at all."

". . . you see, we represent another . . . ah, race. Yes, another race entirely. And where we come from, there are no girls."

"Only men?"

The man sighed. "Only men. Now, then: To state it bluntly, the ideal situation would be for us to have the girls. Which is precisely what we intend to accomplish. Thus, after tomorrow night, *we* shall have the girls and *you*—"

"Ah, *hah!*" Trindle pointed with the bottle. "Let me tell it. You're really invaders from another planet. Mars, Jupiter, Venus . . . Venus, there's a kick. And you've come down in flying saucers to steal all our girls. But Trindle-the-hero-of-our-story has stumbled onto your little scheme. And Trindle will call the president and the president will say, 'By Jesus, Trindle, we can't have that sort of thing, can we?' and call out the home guard."

"No," the man said. "I'm afraid you're awfully wrong, old chap. However, that's a nice line you've given the president."

Trindle shrugged. "I do what I can."

"Now, to take up where I left off: We most certainly are *not* invaders from another planet. I mean, that sort of thing is horrid, really. And there are no saucers. No Mars, no Jupiter, no Venus—"

"Catchy thing, though, that Venus. You know: Venus, girls."

"I quite understand the tieup," the man said dryly. "Now, may I continue?"

"You're on," said Trindle.

"Thank you. Actually, you see, we live right here *with* you. Perhaps *beside* you would be a better explanation. But in another sphere."

"I know," said Trindle. "And yours is an advanced civilization. Man, all those glass tubes and crackling blue lights and girls in abbreviated costumes and that bit. Doesn't anyone ever do one of these things where the other damn planet is backward and ugly and stupid and the people walk around with clubs?"

"Nicely put but for one thing," the man said. "We *are* far advanced, yes. But we have no girls, remember?"

"Not even one little old bitty one?"

"Not one."

Trindle swirled the brandy around in the bottom of the bottle. He wrinkled his forehead.

"That doesn't sound so damned advanced to me. Now, I don't want

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to pry, but how in the hell do you manage to . . ."

"To . . . ah, perpetuate, to carry on the line?" The man scratched his head. "I *must* say it isn't easy. With our race, it's chemical. Let me put it this way: We're a couple of cuts above your race in our test-tube conception system. We use a combination of liquids and solids in . . . well, it's kind of like a vat, you see. Then . . ."

"And you turn out people like fine old wines. You take the lid off the barrel and there's good old Henry?"

"Yes, yes. I mean, that puts it much more succinctly than I could. But, you see—"

"I know. You've been uncorking those barrels for years and you're getting pretty fed up with finding nothing but men in there, huh?"

"Exactly." The man shrugged. "There's just something in the mixture . . . I mean, Lord knows we've *tried*. But . . ."

"No girls."

"No girls."

They reflected on it, staring at each other.

"However!" The man pointed at Trindle. "All that will change tomorrow night. Electronically. Like focusing a camera: all the girls in your world will quite suddenly slide out of focus, vanish, and take shape in our world. And it's really not as impossible as you might think. It's all a matter of sound waves, beams—"

"—and crackling blue lights."

"Well, yes, to a certain extent. It's actually a sort of cataclysmic shift to the left . . ."

"That's a good line there," Trindle said.

"Thank you. Now: To anticipate your next question, we intend to accomplish this during the Ed Sullivan-Steve Allen time zone between eight and nine because conditions are nationally just correct. I mean, with so many sets tuned in to two wave bands . . . well, it just sets up the best possible conditions."

"If Sullivan finds out, he'll want you to do it on his show," Trindle said. "But . . . ah, *hah!* But what about the girls on your show tonight? They looked real enough to me. And if they represent the other sphere, old boy, you can throw the switch on me anytime."

"I'm awfully glad you brought that up. That's why this show is on in the first place. Just another proof of our system. The young ladies you saw tonight were . . . ah, shifted into our sphere earlier. And quite neatly, I might add. Sort of an advance run, one might say." He tugged at his tie again. "Of course, their being here dancing without . . . you know; well, it keeps our men fired up along the relay stations. Gives everyone in our sphere the incentive to carry on. This is sort of a preview of . . ."

"Coming attractions."

"Ummm, yes."

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"I'm sold," Trindle said. "And it's high time we had another little old drink. I shan't be but a minute."

Trindle stood up and fell flat on his face.

The television screen was blank the first time he woke up, and he turned his head over on the rug and slept some more. Later in the morning he crawled carefully to the bed and put himself into it gently. The sun was slanting in through the slitted blinds later in the day when he got up and made a pot of coffee. Stepping slowly and carefully, he walked back to the bed, sat down and drank it. Then he slept some more.

The television set woke him up.

It was crackling and giving off bursts of blue light.

Trindle stooped slowly and picked up the screwdriver. He turned the set around and jiggled some wires. He tapped a few tubes. The noise stopped and he threw the screwdriver down. Then he walked into the bathroom, stood in front of the mirror and looked at his tongue.

"Look," he said, "no fur."

The smell of fresh perking coffee made him feel a little better and he sat down in the kitchenette waiting for it. He looked at his watch. Eight fifteen. Time for the girls to go. He shrugged, poured a cup of coffee and walked to the window.

There were lots of girls walking in the crowds below. Girls. Little girls, lovely girls, babies in pink booties. He waited, watching them.

Eight forty-five.

Trindle went back to the window with a fresh cup of coffee and looked out.

But the girls were still there. Tall ones, short ones. Chic ones. He lit a cigarette and waited some more.

Nine o'clock straight up.

And they were still there.

He stayed at the window until nine fifteen just to make certain, then walked back into the kitchen and lit the burner under the coffeepot. Smiling, he poured a fresh cup and stirred in a little brandy. And he was just raising it to his lips when the voice from the front room said:

"Oh, Trindle."

He scowled and put the cup down. "Just a minute," he said over his shoulder. Then he took a deep breath, walked into the front room and looked at the television set.

The man was there.

He had a streak of grease on his face and his suit was rumpled. He was holding a twist of wire in one hand and a glass tube in the other. And there was a big switchboard behind him, its lights blinking weakly, wires hanging loose like shoestrings. The man sighed and threw down the tube.

"Trindle," he said, "do you still think you can sell the show?"

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Lester del Rey should be, at the moment, much in the thoughts of all science fiction readers as the author of last year's best novel of "pure" s.f., NERVES. *The del Rey story you're about to read is something completely different and, I think, more characteristic of the author. For though del Rey has been (under his own and at least a dozen other names) a science-fantasy editor, a writer of s.f. juveniles, a pioneer in the humanization of adult s.f., many of us feel that his best and most typical work has been as a writer of fantasy—"which is after all," del Rey has said, "even more fun than science fiction." You'll find some of his unforgettable* Unknown *fantasies in his fine collection* AND SOME WERE HUMAN *(Prime, 1948); his latest is this subtle and sensitive tale of a completely new (and psychologically illuminating) kind of ghost.*

Little Jimmy

by LESTER DEL REY

I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT MEETING a ghost would be a pretty comforting thing. By the time a man is past fifty and old enough to realize death, anything that will prove he doesn't come to a final, meaningless end should be a help. Even being doomed to haunt some place in solitude through all eternity doesn't have the horror of not being!

Of course, religion offers hope to some—but most of us don't have the faith of our forefathers. A ghost should be proof against the unimaginable finality of death.

That's the way I used to feel. Now, I don't know. If I could only explain little Jimmy . . .

We heard him, all right. At Mother's death, the whole family heard him, right down to my sister Agnes, who's the most complete atheist I know. Even her youngest daughter, downstairs at the time, came running up to see who the other child was. It wasn't any case of collective hallucination, any more than it was something that can be explained by any natural laws we know.

The doctor heard it, too, and from the way he looked, I suppose he'd heard little Jimmy more than once before. He won't talk about it, though, and the others were never around for a previous chance.

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I'm the only one who will admit to hearing little Jimmy more than that single time. I wish I didn't have to admit it, even to myself.

We were a big family, though the tradition for such families was already dying at the turn of the century. Mother and Dad wanted it that way, and the four girls who died before they had any chance to live couldn't change things much. Six of us boys and three girls lived, and that justified it all to Mother. There would have been more, I guess, if Dad hadn't been killed by an angry bull while I was away saving the world for Democracy. Mother could have had other husbands, maybe—the big Iowa farm with its huge old house would have guaranteed that—but she was dead set against it. And we older kids drifted into city jobs, helping the others through college until they had jobs of their own. Eventually, Mother was left alone in the old house, while the town outgrew itself, until the farm was sold for lots around it.

That left her with a small fortune, particularly after the second war. She didn't seem to need us, and she was getting "sot" in her ways and hard to get along with. So little by little, we began visiting her less and less. I was the nearest, working in Des Moines, but I had my own life, and she seemed happy and capable, even at well past seventy.

I sent her birthday and holiday notes—or at least Liza sent them for me—and kept meaning to see her. But my oldest boy seemed to go to pieces after the second war. My daughter married a truck-driver and had a set of twins before they found a decent apartment. My youngest boy was taken prisoner in Korea. I was promoted to president of the roofing company. And a new pro at the club was coaching me into breaking ninety most of the time.

Then Mother began writing letters—the first real ones in years. They were cheerful enough, filled with chit-chat about some neighbors, the new drapes on the windows, a recipe for lemon cream pie, and such. At first, I thought it was a fine sign. Then something in them began to bother me. It wasn't until the fifth one, though, that I found anything definite.

In that, she wrote a few words about the new teacher at the old schoolhouse. I went over it twice before realizing that the school building had been torn down fifteen years before. When that registered, other things began connecting. The drapes were ones she had put up years before, and the recipe was her first one—the one that always tasted too sweet, before she changed it! There were other things.

It kept bothering me, and I finally put through a call. Mother sounded fine, though a little wor-

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ried for fear something had gone wrong with me. She talked for a couple of minutes, muttered something about lunch on the stove, and hung up quickly. It couldn't have been more normal. I got out my clubs and was halfway down the front steps before something drove me back to her letters.

Then I called Doctor Matthews. After half a minute identifying myself, I asked about Mother.

The professional tone dropped into his voice at once. She was fine—remarkably good physical condition for a woman of her age. No, no reason I should come down at once. There wasn't a thing wrong with her.

He overdid it, and he couldn't quite conceal the worry in his voice. I suppose I'd been thinking of taking a few days off later to see her. But when he hung up, I put the clubs back in the closet and changed my clothes. Liza was out at some civic betterment club, and I left a note for her. She'd taken the convertible, though, so I was in luck. The new Cadillac was just back from a tune-up and perfect for a stiff drive. There'd also be less chance of picking up a ticket if I beat the speed limit a little; most cops are less inclined to be tough on a man who's driving one of those cars. I made good time all the way.

Matthews was still at the same address, but his white hair gave me a shock. He frowned at me, lifting his eyes from my waistline to what hair I had left, then back to my face. Then he stuck out his hand slowly, stealing a quick glance at the Cadillac.

"I suppose they all call you A. J. now?" he said. "Come on in, since you're here."

He took me back through the reception room and into his office, his eyes going to the car outside again. From somewhere, he drew out a bottle of good scotch. At my nod, he mixed it with water from a cooler. He settled back, studying me as he took his own seat. "A. J., eh?" he commented again. It was a sour note here, somehow. "That sounds like success. Thought your mother mentioned something about your trouble a few years back?"

"Not financial," I told him. I'd thought only Liza remembered it. She must have written to Mother at the time, since I'd kept it out of the papers. And after I'd agreed to buy the trucking line for our son-in-law, she'd finally completely forgiven me. It was none of Matthews' business—but out here, doctors considered everything their business, I remembered. "Why, Doc?"

He studied me, let his eyes sweep over the car again, and then tipped up the glass to finish the whisky. "Just curiosity. No, damn it, I might as well be honest. You'll see her anyhow, now. She's an old

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woman, Andrew, and she has what might be called a tidy fortune. When children who haven't worried about her for years turn up, it might not be affection. And I'm not going to have anything happen to Martha now!"

The hints in that fitted too closely with my own suspicions. I could feel them tightening up, mixing in with annoyance and a touch of fear. I didn't want to ask the question. I wanted to get mad at him for an interfering old meddler. But I had to know. "You mean—senile dementia?"

"No," he answered quickly, with a faintly lifted eyebrow. "No, Andrew, she isn't crazy! She's in fine physical shape, and sane enough to take care of herself for the next fifteen years she'll probably live. And she doesn't need any fancy doctors and psychiatrists. Just remember that, and remember she's an old woman. Thirteen children in less than twenty years! A widow before she was forty. Lonely all these years, even if she is too independent to bother you kids. An old woman's entitled to whatever kind of happiness she can get. And don't forget that!"

He stopped, seeming surprised at himself. Then he stood up and reached for his hat. "Come on, I'll ride out with you."

He kept up a patter of local history as we drove down the streets where corn had grown when I last saw this section. There was a hospital where the woods had been, and the old spring was covered by an apartment building. The big house where we had been born stood out, sprawling in ugly warmth among the facsimile piano-boxes they were calling houses nowadays.

I wanted to turn back, but Matthew motioned me after him up the walk. The front door was still unlocked, and he went in, tilting his head toward the stairs.

"Martha! Hey, Martha!"

"Jimmy's out back, Doc," a voice called down. It was Mother's voice, unchanged except for a puzzling lilt I'd never heard before, and I drew a quick breath of relief.

"OK, Martha," Matthews called up. "I'll just see him, then, and call you up later. You won't want me around when you see who I brought you. It's Andrew!"

"How nice! Tell him to sit down and I'll be dressed in a minute!"

Doc shrugged. "I'll sit out in the garden a few minutes," he told me. "Then I'll catch a cab back. But remember: your mother deserves any happiness she can get. Don't you ruin it!"

He went through the back door, and I found the parlor, and dropped onto the old sofa. Then I frowned. It had been stored in the attic in 1913, when Dad bought the new furniture. I stared through the soft dimness, making out all the old pieces. Even the rug was

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the way it had been when I was a child. I moved back to the other rooms, finding them the same as they had been forty years before, except for the television set in the dining room and the completely modern kitchen, with a pot of soup bubbling on the back of the stove.

I was getting the thick feeling in my throat and the worry I'd had before when the sound of steps on the stairs brought my eyes up.

Mother came down, a trifle slowly, but without any sign of weakness. She didn't rest her hand on the banister. She might have been the woman to match the furnishings of the house, except for the wrinkles and the white hair. And the dress was new, but a perfect copy of one she'd worn when I was still a child!

She seemed not to hear my gasp. Her hand came out to catch mine, and she bent forward, kissing me on the cheek. "You look real good, Andrew. There, now, let's see. Umm-hmm. Liza's been feeding you right, I can see that. But I'll bet you could eat some real home-made soup and pie, eh? Come out in the kitchen. I'll fix it in a minute."

She wasn't only in fine physical shape—she was like a woman fifteen years younger than her age. And she'd even remembered to call me Andrew, instead of the various nick-names she'd used during my growing up. That wasn't senility! A senile woman would have turned back to the earliest one, as I remembered it—particularly since I'd had to work hard to get her to drop the childhood names. Yet the house . . .

She bustled about the kitchen, dishing out some of the rich, hot soup. She hadn't been a good cook when I was a kid, but she'd grown steadily better, and this was superlative. "I guess Doc must have pronounced Jimmy well," she said casually. "He's gone running off somewhere now. Well, after two weeks cooped up here with the measles, I can't blame him. I remember how you were when you had them. Notice how I had the house fixed up, Andrew?"

I nodded, puzzling over her words. "I noticed the old furniture. But this Jimmy . . . ?"

"Oh, you never met him, did you? Never mind, you will. How long you staying, Andrew?"

I tried to figure things out, cursing Matthews for not warning me of this. Of course, I'd heard somehow that one of my various nephews had lost his wife. Was he the one who'd had the young boy? And hadn't he gone up to Alaska? No, that was Frank's son. And why would anyone hand over a youngster to Mother, anyhow? There were enough younger women in the family.

I caught her eyes on me, and pulled myself together. "I'll be

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leaving in a couple hours, Mother. I just—"

"It was real nice of you to drop over," she interrupted me, as she had always cut into our answers. "I've been meaning to see you and Liza soon, but fixing the house kept me kind of busy. Two men carried the furniture down, but I did the rest myself. Makes me feel younger somehow, having the old furniture here."

She dished out a quarter of a peach cobbler and put it in front of me, with a cup of steaming coffee. She took another quarter for herself and filled her big cup. I had a mental picture of Liza with her vitamins and diets. Who was senile?

"Jimmy's going to school now," she said. "He's got a crush on his teacher, too. More pie, Andrew? I'll have to save a piece for little Jimmy, but there are two left."

From outside, there was a sudden noise, and she jumped up, to walk quickly toward the back door. Then she came into the kitchen again. "Just a neighbor kid taking a short-cut. I wish they'd be a little nicer, though, and play with Jimmy. He gets lonesome sometimes. Like my kitchen, Andrew?"

"Nice," I said carefully, trying to keep track of the threads of conversation. "But it's kind of modern."

"That and the television set," she agreed cheerfully. "Some new things are nice. And some old ones. I've got a foam rubber mattress for my bed, but the rest of the room . . . Andrew, you come up. I'll show you something I think's real elegant!"

The house was clean, and no rooms were closed off. I wondered about that as we climbed the stairs. I hadn't seen a maid. But she sniffed in contempt when I mentioned it. "Of course I take care of it myself. That's a woman's job, ain't it? And then, little Jimmy helps some. He's getting to be mighty handy."

The bedroom was something to see. It reminded me of what I'd seen of the nineties in pictures and movies, complete with frills and fripperies. The rest of the house was dulled with the work of years spent fading the upholstery and wallpaper. But here everything seemed bright and new.

"Had a young decorator fellow from Chicago fix it," she explained proudly. "Like what I always wanted when I was a young girl. Cost a fortune, but Jimmy told me I had to do it, because I wanted it." She chuckled fondly. "Sit down, Andrew. How are you and Liza making out? Still fighting over that young hussy she caught you with, or did she take my advice? Silly, letting you know she knew. Nothing makes a man more loving than a little guilt, I always found—especially if the woman gets real sweet about then."

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We spent a solid hour discussing things, and it felt good. I told her how they were finally shipping my youngest back to us. I let her bawl me out for the way the oldest boy was using me and for what she called my snootiness about my son-in-law. But her idea of making him only junior partner in the trucking line at first wasn't bad. I should have thought of it myself. She also told me all the gossip about the family. Somehow, she'd kept track of things. I hadn't even known that Pete had died, though I had heard of the other two deaths. I'd meant to go to the funerals, but there'd been that big deal with Midcity Asphalt and then that trouble getting our man into Congress. Things like that had a habit of coming up at the wrong times.

When I finally stood up to go, I wasn't worried about any danger of a family scandal through Mother. If Matthews thought I'd be bothered about her switching back to the old furniture and having this room decorated period style—no matter what it cost—he was the senile one. I felt good, in fact. It had been better than a full round of golf, with me winning. I started to tell her I'd get back soon. I was even thinking of bringing Liza and the family out for my vacation, instead of the trip to Bermuda we'd talked about.

She got up to kiss me again. Then she caught herself. "Goodness! Here you're going, and you haven't met Jimmy yet. You sit down a minute, Andrew!"

She threw up the window quickly, letting in the scent of roses from the back. "*Jimmy!* Oh, *Jim-my!* It's getting late. Come on in. And wash your face before you come up. I want you to meet your Uncle Andrew."

She turned back, smiling a little apologetically. "He's my pet, Andrew. I always tried to be fair about my children, but I guess I like Jimmy sort of special!"

Downstairs, I could hear a door close faintly, and the muffled sounds of a boy's steps toward the kitchen. Mother sat beaming, happier than I'd seen her for years—since Dad died, in fact. Then the steps sounded on the stairs. I grinned myself, recognizing that little Jimmy must be taking two steps at a time, using the banister to pull himself up. I'd always done that when I was a kid. I was musing on how alike boys are when the steps reached the landing and headed toward the room.

I started to look toward the door, but the transformation on Mother's face caught my attention. She suddenly looked almost young, and her eyes were shining, while her gaze was riveted on the door behind.

There was a faint sound of it opening and closing, and I started to turn. Something prickled up my backbone. Something was wrong!

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And then, as I turned completely, I recognized it. When a door opens, the air in the room moves. We never notice it, unless it doesn't happen. Then the wrongness tells us at once it can't be a real door. This time, the air hadn't moved.

In front of me, the steps sounded, uncertainly, like those of a somewhat shy boy of six. But there was no one there. The thick carpet didn't even bend down as the soft sound of the steps came closer and stopped, just in front of me.

"This is Uncle Andrew, Jimmy," Mother announced happily. "Shake hands like a good boy, now. He came all the way from Des Moines to see you."

I put my hand out, controlled by some vague desire to please her, while I could feel cold sweat running down my arms and legs. I even moved it as if it were being shaken. Then I stumbled to the door, yanked it open, and started down the stairs.

Behind me, the boy's footsteps sounded uncertainly, following out to the landing. Then Mother's steps drowned them, as she came quickly down the stairs after me.

"Andrew, I think you're shy around boys! You're not fooling me. You're just running off because you don't know how to talk to little Jimmy!" She was grinning in amusement. Then she caught my hand again. "You come again real soon, Andrew."

I must have said the right things, somehow. She turned to go up the stairs, just as I heard the steps creak from above, where no one was standing. Then I stumbled out and into my car. I was lucky enough to find a few ounces of whisky in a bottle in the glove compartment. But the liquor didn't help much.

I avoided Matthews' place. I cut onto the main highway and opened the big engine all the way, not caring about cops. I wanted all the distance I could get between myself and the ghost steps of little Jimmy. Ghost? Not even that! Just steps and the weak sound of a door that didn't open. Jimmy wasn't even a ghost—he couldn't be.

I had to slow down as the first laughter tore out of my throat. I swung off the road and let it rip out of me, until the pain in my side finally cut it off.

Things were better after that. And when I started the Cadillac again, I was beginning to think. By the time I reached the outskirts of Des Moines, I had it licked.

It was hallucination, of course. Matthews had tried to warn me that Mother was going through a form of dotage. She'd created a child for herself, going back to her youth for it. The school that wasn't there, the crush on the teacher, the measles—all were real things she was reliving through

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little Jimmy. But because she was so unlike other women in keeping firmly sane about everything except this one fantasy, she'd fooled me. She'd made me think she was completely rational. When she'd explained the return of the old furniture, she'd wiped out all my doubts, which had centered on that.

She'd made me take it for granted that Jimmy was real. And she had made me expect to hear steps when her own listening pose had prepared me for them. I'd been cued by her own faint reactions to her imagination—I must have seen some little gesture, and followed her timing. It had been superbly real to her—and my senses had tricked me.

It wasn't impossible. It was the secret of many of the great stage illusions, aided by my own memories of the old house, and given life by the fact that she believed in the steps, as no stage trickster could believe.

I convinced myself of it almost completely. I had to do that. And finally I nearly dismissed the steps from my mind, and concentrated on Mother. Matthews' words came back to me, and I nodded to myself. It was a harmless fantasy, and Mother was entitled to her pleasure. She was sane enough to care for herself, without any doubt, and physically far better than she had any right to be. With Matthews' interest in her, there was no reason for me to worry about anything.

By the time I pulled the car into the garage, I was making plans for setting up the trucking concern again, following Mother's advice about making myself the senior partner. It hadn't been a wasted day, after all.

Life went on, pretty much as usual. My younger boy was back home for a while. I'd looked forward to that, but somehow the Army had broken the old bonds between us. Even when I had time, there wasn't much we could talk about. I guess it was something of a relief when he left for some job in New York; anyhow, I was busy straightening out a brawl the older one got mixed up in. My daughter was expecting again, and her husband was showing a complete inability to cooperate with me. I didn't have much time to think about little Jimmy. Liza hadn't asked me about my trip, mercifully; there was nothing to keep me from forgetting most of it.

I wrote Mother once in a while, now. Her letters grew longer, and sometimes Jimmy's name appeared, along with quite a bit of advice on the trucking business. Most of that was useless, naturally, but she knew more than I'd suspected about the ways of business. It gave me something to write back about.

I paid a fat fee to a psychiatrist

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for a while, but mostly he only confirmed what I'd already reasoned out. I wasn't interested in some of the other nonsense he tried to sell me, so I stopped going after awhile.

And then I forgot the whole thing when the first tentative feeler from New Mode Roofing and Asphalt suggested a merger. I'd been planting the seed for the idea for months, but getting it set to put control in my hands was a tricky problem. I finally had to compromise by agreeing to move the headquarters to Akron, tearing up my roots overnight and resettling. Liza made a scene over that, and my daughter flatly refused to come. I had to agree to turn the trucking concern over to my son-in-law completely, just when it was beginning to show a profit. But the rift had been coming ever since he'd refused to fire my oldest boy from the job of driving one of the trailers.

Maybe it was just as well. The boy seemed to like it. We'd be in Akron, nobody would know about it, and he'd be better off than he was hanging around with some of the friends he'd had before. I meant to write Mother about that, since she'd suggested it once, and I suspected she'd had something to do with it. But the move took all my attention. After that, there was the problem of organizing the new firm.

I decided to see Mother, instead of writing to her. I wasn't going to be fooled again with the same hallucination. The new psychiatrist assured me of that, and advised the trip. I had already marked off the date on my calendar for the visit next month.

It didn't work out. Matthews called me at two o'clock in the morning with the news, after wasting two days tracing me down through acquaintances. Nobody thought of looking me up in a business directory, of course.

Mother had pneumonia and the prognosis was unfavorable.

"At her age, these things are serious," he said. His voice wasn't professional this time. "You'd better get here as quickly as you can. She's been asking for you."

"I'll charter a plane at once," I told him. This would raise the deuce with the voting of stock we'd scheduled, but I couldn't stay away, obviously. I'd almost convinced myself Mother would go on for another twenty years. Now . . . "How'd it happen?"

"The big storm last week. She went out in it with rubbers and an umbrella to fetch little Jimmy from school! She got sopping wet. When I reached her, she already had a fever. I've been trying everything, but . . ."

I hung up, sick. Little Jimmy! For a minute, I wanted him to be real enough to strangle.

I pounded on Liza's door and got her to charter the plane while

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I packed and roused out my secretary on the other phone. Liza drove me to the airport where the plane was warmed up and waiting. I turned to say good-bye, but she was dragging out a second bag from the back.

"I'm going," she announced flatly.

I started to argue, saw her expression, and gave up. A few minutes later, we took off.

Most of the rest of the family was already there, hovering around outside the newly decorated bedroom where Mother lay under an oxygen tent; huddles of the family and their children were in every other room on the second floor, staring at the closed door and discussing things in the harsh whispers people use for the scene of death.

Matthews motioned them back and came over to me at once. "No hope, I'm afraid, Andrew," he said, and there were tears in his eyes.

"Isn't there anything we can do?" Liza asked, her voice dropping to the hoarse whisper of the others. "Anything at all, Doctor?"

He shook his head. "I've already talked to the best men in the country. We've tried everything. Even prayer."

From one side of the hall, Agnes sniffed loudly. Her militant atheism couldn't be downed by anything, it seemed. It didn't matter. There was death in the house, thick enough to smell. I had always hated the waste and futility of dying. Now it had a personal meaning, and it was worse. Behind that closed door, Mother lay dying, and nothing I could do would help.

"Can I go in?" I asked, against my wishes.

Matthews nodded. "It can't hurt now. And she wanted to see you."

I went in after him, with the eyes of the others thrusting at me. Matthews waved the nurse out and went over to the window; the choking sound from his throat was louder than the faint hiss of the oxygen. I hesitated, then drew near the bed.

Mother lay there, and her eyes were open. She turned them toward me, but there was no recognition in them. One of her thin hands was poking at the transparent tent over her. I looked toward Matthews, who nodded slowly. "It won't matter now."

He helped me move it aside. Her hand groped out, while the wheezing sound of her breathing grew louder. I tried to follow her pointing finger. But it was Matthews who picked up the small picture of a young boy and put it into her hands, where she cradled it to her.

"Mother!" It ripped out of me, louder than I had intended. "Mother, it's Andy! I'm here!"

Her eyes turned again, and she moved her parched lips. "An-

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drew?" she asked weakly. Then a touch of a smile came briefly. She shook her head slightly. "Jimmy! Jimmy!"

The hands lifted the picture until she could see it. *"Jimmy!"* she repeated.

From below, there was the sound of a door closing weakly, and steps moved across the lower floor. They took the stairs, two steps at a time, but quickly now, without need of the banister. They crossed the landing. The door remained closed, but there was the sound of a knob turning, a faint squeak of hinges, then another sound of a door closing. Young steps moved across the rug, invisible, a sound that seemed to make all other sounds fade to silence. The steps reached the bed and stopped.

Mother turned her eyes, and the smile quickened again. One hand lifted. Then she dropped back and her breathing stopped.

The silence was broken by the sound of feet again—heavier, surer feet that seemed to be planted on the floor from the bed. Two sets of footsteps sounded. One might have been those of a small boy. The others were the quick, sharp sounds that only a young woman can make as she hurries along with her first-born beside her. They moved across the room.

There was no hesitation at the door this time, nor any sound of opening or closing. The steps went on, across the landing and down the stairs. As Matthews and I followed into the hall, they seemed to pick up speed toward the back door. Now finally there was a soft, deliberate sound of a door closing, and then silence.

I jerked my gaze back, to see the eyes of all the others riveted on the back entrance, while emotions I had never seen washed over the slack faces. Agnes rose slowly, her eyes turned upwards. Her thin lips opened, hesitated, and closed into a tight line. She sat down like a stick-woman folding, glancing about to see whether the others had noticed.

From below, her daughter came running up the stairs. "Mother! Mother, who was the little boy I heard?"

I didn't wait for the answer, nor the thick words with which Matthews confirmed the news of Mother's death. I was back beside the poor old body, taking the picture from the clasped hands.

Liza had followed me in, with the color just beginning to return to her face. "Ghosts," she said thickly. Then she shook her head, and her voice softened. "Mother and one of the babies, come back to get her. I always thought . . ."

"No," I told her. "Not one of my sisters who died too young. Nothing that easy, Liza. Nothing that good. It was a boy. A boy who had measles when he was six, who took the stairs two at a

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time—a boy named Jimmy . . ."

She stared at me doubtfully, then down at the picture I held—the picture of me when I was six. "But you—" she began. Then she turned away without finishing, while the others began straggling in.

We had to stay for the ceremony, of course, though I guess Mother didn't need me at the funeral. She already had her Jimmy.

She'd wanted to name me James for her father, and Dad had insisted on Andrew for his. He'd won, and Andrew came first. But until I was ten, I'd always been called Jimmy by Mother. Jimmy, Andy, Andrew, A. J. A man's name was part of his soul, I remembered, in the old beliefs.

But it didn't make sense, no matter how I figured it out by myself. I tried to talk it over with Matthews, but he wouldn't comment. I made another effort with Liza when we were on the plane going back.

"I can believe in Mother's spirit," I finished. I'd been over it all so often in my own mind that I had accepted that, finally. "But who was Jimmy? We all heard him—even Agnes' daughter heard him from downstairs. So he wasn't a delusion. But he can't be a ghost. A ghost is a returned spirit—the soul of a man who has died!"

"Well?" Liza asked coldly. I waited, but she went on staring out of the plane window, not saying another word.

I used to think meeting a ghost would offer reassurance to a man. Now I don't know. If I could only explain little Jimmy . . .

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Randall Garrett and Lin Carter had not been born when Hugo Gernsback created RALPH 124C 41+. *To stress their youth further (for one can, like me, be far from young and still have been born after the first appearance of* RALPH *in* Modern Electrics*), they had not even been born when Gernsback founded* Amazing Stories, *the first all-science-fiction magazine. Yet these two valiant young adventurers have somehow (I suspect by time machine) nobly recaptured the spirit and significance of that early age of science fiction in this story designed to rouse our long-dormant Sense of Wonder.*

Masters of the Metropolis

by RANDALL GARRETT AND LIN CARTER

CHAPTER I
The Journey Begins

IT WAS IN THE EIGHTH MONTH OF the Year 1956 that Sam IM4 SF+ strode down the surging, crowded streets of Newark, one of the many cities of its kind in the State of New-Jersey. He had just left his apartment in one of the vast, soaring pylons of the city. There, living in universal accord, hundreds of families dwelt side by side in the same great tower, one of many which loomed as many as forty stories above the street.

He paused to board a *bus* which stopped at regularly-spaced intervals to take on new passengers. The *bus*, or Omnibus, was a streamlined, self-propelled public vehicle, powered by the exploding gases of distilled petroleum, ignited in a sealed cylinder by means of an electrical spark. The energy thus obtained was applied as torque to a long metal bar known as the "drive-shaft," which turned a set of gears in a complex apparatus known as the "differential housing." These gears, in turn, caused the rear wheels to revolve about their axes, thus propelling the vehicle forward smoothly at velocities as great as eighty miles every hour!

Dropping a coin into the receptacle by the driver's cubicle, and receiving a courteous welcome from the technician employed to pilot the machine, he took his seat inside the vehicle. Marveling anew

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at the luxurious comfort of the form-fitting seats, Sam IM4 SF+ gazed out of the window at the gorgeous spectacle of the city as it raced past.

Within a very few moments, the vehicle decelerated to a smooth stop before Pennsylvania Station, a mammoth terminal where the far-flung lines of public transportation converged.

Entering the great building, he paused to marvel anew at the inspiring architectural genius capable of erecting such an imposing monument to modern civilization —a building which would have struck with awe the simpler citizens of earlier times.

Threading his way through the crowds which thronged the vaulted interior of the terminal, he came to a *turnstile*, an artifact not unlike a rimless wheel, whose spokes revolved to allow his passage. He placed a coin in the mechanism, and the marvelous machine —but one of the many mechanical marvels of the age— recorded his passage on a small dial and automatically added the value of his coin to the total theretofore accumulated. All this, mind, without a single human hand at the controls!

Once past the *turnstile*, Sam IM4 SF+ followed the ingenious directional signs on the walls, which led him to a vast, artificially-lighted underground cavern. There he waited for his second conveyance to arrive.

Sam IM4 SF+, a typical citizen of his age, towered a full six feet above the ground. His handsome face was crowned by a massive, intellectual forehead. His hair was dark and smooth, neatly trimmed to follow the contours of his skull. He was clad in complex and attractive garments, according to the fashion of his century. His trousers were woven of a fabric synthetically formulated from a clever mixture of chemicals, as was his coat, for these favored people no longer depended upon herds of domesticated quadrupeds for their raiment. These garments were fastened, not by buttons, but by an ingenious system of automatically interlocking metallic teeth known as a *zipper*.

Suspended from his ears, a frame of stiff wires supported a pair of polished lenses before his eyes, which served not only to protect those orbs from the rushing winds that were a natural hazard of this Age of Speed, but also to implement his vision, lending it an almost telescopic power.

As he stood on the platform, his sensitive ears detected the distant roar of a *subway train*. Gazing down the dark tunnel by whose egress the platform stood, he observed the cyclopean glare of the artificial light affixed to the blunt nose of the onrushing all-metallic projectile. The entire cavern reverberated to the roar of the vehicle as it emerged from the tunnel with a

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mighty rush of wind and braked smoothly to a dead stop before his very feet.

The marvel of modern transportation which was to bear him on his journey to the great Metropolis of New-York had arrived!

CHAPTER II
Aboard the *Subway Train*

The automatic door slid open, and our hero entered the car and was offered a seat by one of the courteous, uniformed crew-members.

Pausing to marvel anew at this miracle of modern science, Sam IM4 SF+ turned to a fellow traveler and remarked conversationally: "Ah, fellow citizen; is it not wonderful to reflect that the same Energy which propels us through the very bowels of the Earth is identical with the lightning that flames in stormy skies, far above these Stygian depths? For thousands of years, the simple peasants of a ruder age looked upon the lightning bolt as the awesome weapon of angry gods; little did they surmise that their descendants would one day chain this Gargantuan power and harness it to serve their will!"

"How true!" remarked his companion. "And could one of them now be with us as we speed through this fantastic system of tunnels, would he not be struck dumb with terror and think us gods?"

"Would he not, indeed," smiled Sam, "commonplace though it is to us."

As they were speaking, the *subway train* sprang to life and plunged into the ebon mouth of another tunnel. In an instant, the vast, lighted cavern was lost to view, and the car was swallowed in the blackness of the tunnel, illuminated only by the colored lights set at intervals along the cavern walls as signals to the pilot.

The mighty engine thundered through the darkness like some mythical monster of a bygone age. Sam, however, experienced no difficulty in observing his fellow passengers, since the interior of the vehicle was brilliantly illuminated by ingenious artificial lighting. These *light bulbs* consisted of cleverly blown globes of glass which contained a delicate and intricate filament of tungsten wire. Upon the application of sufficient electrical current, the wire heated up to many hundreds of degrees, thus emitting a bright and pleasant light. Indeed, so great was the temperature at which they operated, the globes were filled with inert gas in order to prevent even the highly refractive tungsten from burning in the air!

Sam spent his time pleasantly by reading the various colorful and informative signs within the car. These advertisements portrayed the many necessities and luxuries which all citizens of this age might

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acquire. Each told of its own product in glowing, descriptive terms. Here, a poster told of a harmless chemical mixture which, when applied to the skin, destroyed the unpleasant body odors with which earlier ages had been plagued; there, another card told of a confection which, when masticated, acted as a tooth-cleansing agent, thus serving as an aid to the buoyant health of the people of this era.

Within a few minutes, the vehicle had passed beneath the rolling waters of the mighty Hudson River, and emerged from the darkness into another vast cavern, larger than, though similar to, the one in which our hero first boarded the conveyance.

As the passengers emerged in orderly rows from the *subway train*, Sam joined them and thus beheld the awe-inspiring vastness of Grand Central Station. Breath-taking was the panorama that greeted his dazzled orbs as he joined the motley throng that surged and eddied beneath the tremendous dome. A traveler from an earlier age would have been confused and lost in the orderly chaos of the great terminal. Level upon level, tier upon tier, exit upon exit met the eye at every turn.

But Sam IM4 SF+ was no stranger here; indeed, he gave scarcely a glance to the confusion through which he made his way. In a very few moments, he left the building to gaze in awe at the fantastic sight of the great Metropolis of New-York, the hugest city ever constructed—vast, even on the mammoth scale of other cities of this advanced age.

CHAPTER III
Through the Vast Metropolis

All about him soared the incredible towers, spires, pylons, monuments, buildings, palaces, temples, cathedrals, domes, and other breath-taking constructions of the Metropolis. Through its broad streets moved the traffic of the great city. Row on row of metallic projectiles called *automobiles* passed smoothly, silently, and swiftly through the streets. Powered by the same "internal combustion engine" that powered the Omnibus, they were marvels of mechanical genius. So common were they to the favored children of this Mechanical Age that the gayly-costumed passers-by scarcely gave them a glance, even when crossing the streets through which the *autos* ran.

Sam lifted his nobly-sculptured head and gazed enthralled at the towers that rose, rank upon serried rank, as far as the eye could see. Their smooth, regular sides of artificial stone literally blazed with hundreds of illuminated windows. Their lofty tops seemed to touch the very sky itself—for which reason, let me remark in passing, the inhabitants called them *Sky-Scrapers*.

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"Ah, madam," exclaimed Sam to a lovely young woman who, curiously attired in the daring fashions of the age, stood near him, also gazing in awe at the spectacle, "how much vaster is our great Metropolis even than storied Nineveh, or Tyre, or mighty Babylon with its famed hanging gardens, or Carthage of yore!"

"Truly, good sir," she responded modestly. "And is it not wonderful that we are here to see it all? Ah, would not some proud Caesar or Attila of old have given all his treasures for such a privilege?"

Before them, in multicolored grandeur, blazed hundreds of vast advertising displays, each shining with a light that dazzled the eye of the beholder. These sign-lights were ingeniously wrought tubes of glass of no greater diameter than a common lead-pencil, but many feet in length. The tubes were curved to form the various letters and symbols which made up the great illuminated signs, and were filled with various gases under low pressure. When electrical energy of tremendous voltage was applied to electrodes at the ends of the tubes, the gas within glowed brilliantly with colored light, just as the atmosphere glows when a bolt of lightning passes through it during a thunderstorm. By filling these tubes with divers gases, all the hues of the rainbow could be duplicated.

Sam IM4 SF+ turned his admiring gaze from the breath-taking displays and started to cross the street. By a clever contrivance of flashing signal-lamps, the flow of mechanical traffic was periodically halted, to thus allow unmounted citizens to pass from one side to the other in complete safety. Sam strode across the street as the traffic halted in strict obedience to the signal-lamps. Once on the other side, he started off through the byways of the city. On either side stretched mercantile establishments of divers sorts, selling luxuries and commodities undreamed of by earlier peoples. He strode past a theater of the age which, instead of living actors, displayed amazing dramas recorded on strips of celluloid and projected by beams of light on tremendous white surfaces within the darkened theater. Ingeniously recorded voices and sounds, cleverly synchronized to the movement of the figures on the screen, made them seem lifelike.

"Ah, the wonders of modern science!" Sam marveled anew.

CHAPTER IV
The Threat of the Mind Masters

Not even the varied panorama of the Metropolis could keep Sam IM4 SF+ from thinking of his mission to the city. He had constantly kept a sharp look-out, watching those who might betray too much interest in his person, being careful that no one was following him.

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For Sam IM4 SF+ knew that danger was afoot in New-York; a secret group known as the Mind Masters were plotting to take over the Government, using super-scientific devices, about which Sam could only conjecture. There was no proof, unfortunately, with which our hero could have gone to the rulers of this enlightened country and denounced the scoundrels for the criminals they were. Only Sam IM4 SF+ knew of the existence of this evil band—Sam, and a few loyal cohorts that he had gathered to combat the menace.

For Sam, like few others across the world, had a Sixth Sense, which enabled him to detect certain emotional responses which were, to others, non-existent.

Thus, Sam proceeded carefully to his destination, for he knew full well that if he were discovered, death would be his reward.

Little did he know that, in a secret room, many miles away, the Mind Masters were, at that very moment, plotting his destruction. Twelve men in black hoods were seated about a table. Eleven of them were listening to the twelfth speak.

"Even now," he said, in a voice that reeked with evil, "our agents are following IM4 SF+, clad in invisibility suits. Fear not, my friends, we shall destroy that prying Sixth Sense of his. When our agents close in at last, they will use the hyper-decerebralizer ray. The fool has no chance!"

To Be Continued

WILL THE CABAL DESTROY SAM'S WONDER SENSE?

WHAT OF COUNTESS TAMARA AND THE HIDDEN LEGION?

WILL DR. DOOM PERFECT HIS ROCKETSHIP IN TIME TO ESCAPE?

CAN DALE ARDENT SURVIVE THE MIND-FREEZING MACHINE?

READ THE SECOND PART OF THIS AMAZING SERIAL AND SEE!

I regret that the Garrett-Carter Time Travel Expedition succeeded in bringing back only this first installment. These provocative closing questions must go forever unanswered.—A.B.

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One of the most individual of new writers casts fresh light on a classic problem through his special knowledge of Latin America . . . and his more general knowledge of human nature.

The Status Quo Peddlers

by G. C. EDMONDSON

YOU'RE LUCKY THESE PEOPLE DON'T understand English or I'd have to shoot you right off. You're the third one that's strayed up here in the last eight years. Never mind what happened to the other two. Now quit that screaming. You'll get your rifle back when we're good and ready to give it to you. Yes, I know what you've been through. Will you please shut up and let me tell a story for a change? All right.

It was just another job when I first came down here. That was way back in nineteen fifty—You still keep dates? Well, the hell with it. Like I said, I took the train down from Nogales. After four days on the *rápido* I got off and hired a mule. One thing about the country, everybody's polite and willing to give directions. Of course, they might not be the right directions . . .

After two bum steers I got on the right trail and fourteen hours later I was in Temazcal. Heard of it? Sure you have. Not the same place either. The word means hot springs in some Mexican Indian dialect. In the volcano belt they've got more temazcales than you can shake a stick at.

The saddle on that mule was a beautiful, silver-mounted job. It conjured up visions of the Cid raising hell with the Moors but after three hours I lost all feeling of historical significance.

I walked a while up a creek bed —arroyo, they used to call them in the westerns—but pretty soon I had to go back to riding. We gained a little elevation and the vegetation shrank to reasonable proportions. I couldn't say the same for the ticks. I wondered if any of the shots I'd had were good for spotted fever.

Señor Ojara was waiting for me on the veranda of what looked like a Mexican house turned inside out. You know how they build right out to the property line, nothing but bars on the outside. Handy if

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you have teenage daughters but . . .

It had a thatched roof like every other building in town. Ojara was wearing a pith helmet. I almost expected him to give the regimental cheer and order me a chota peg. When he spoke, though it was in Spanish. The illusion of Kipling's India dissolved completely when he offered me tequila con limón.

After four tequilas con limón I had learned that Miguel Ojara's English was about as good as my Spanish and that the resemblance between Ojara and O'Hara was more than coincidence. Seems there were two Irishmen.

Next morning he explained the setup. We had to pay the local ranchers and either witness the shooting or get tangible proof that it had been done.

"What do you mean by tangible proof?" I asked Mike.

"It'll have to be pretty good," he said. "I remember the last aftosa epidemic." By aftosa he meant hoof and mouth disease. "We made them bring in the ears."

"Something go wrong?" I asked.

"Things were fine for several months."

"I don't get it."

"Six months after the campaign was over earless cattle started showing up."

I digested this for a while as we rode out toward the nearest rancho. People automatically visualize thousands of acres and the big house and all the little houses around it where the peones live and all that hogwash. It's nice background for movies. This rancho was forty acres and had forty-eight head ranging in the hills. I wondered if the cattle needed oxygen in the upper pastures.

Don Nepomuceno Uchuturría was a wiry little man of fifty, I thought. Actually, he was seventy-two. He couldn't read but nobody could slip him a one peso bill and call it a ten. He lived in a jacal like the famous grass shacks of Hawaii but the women were on their knees in the back yard playing the stone piano—grinding masa for tortillas. No poi.

"Buenos días, don Nepomuceno," Mike said.

He greeted us with suspicion but got a lot more friendly when he saw the bills in Mike's saddlebags. Some Indians were piling mezquite brush. Nepomuceno's son was driving the herd down from the upper pastures.

Shooting thirty cows isn't my idea of sport. We got most of them to drop in the piled mezquite and the boy got a rope on the rest. It was amazing, the weight his little horse could drag with that high-horned old saddle.

If you've ever stepped out for a minute and left the steak on the fire you may have a faint idea of what it smelled like when we set fire to the mezquite. Even so, it didn't finish the job. The zopilotes would be too heavy to fly for several days.

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They were circling overhead before the second shot was fired.

The womenfolk turned out a meal for us. For one horrible moment I thought we'd get beefsteak. No matter how horrible it sounds in translation, cracklings cooked in green pepper tastes good. After dinner Mike got the old man off in a corner and started arguing. I sat at the table, enjoying an extra cup of coffee. They char sugar in the roast to give it that asphalt color. The girls cleared the table, shying away from me as if I had the aftosa. I put it down to my being a foreigner and a government man at that.

Mike beckoned. "He says that's all."

"All what?" I asked.

"Last week he had forty-eight head of cattle."

"But we only shot thirty today."

"That's what I mean," Mike said.

"Where are the other eighteen?"

Mike pointed toward the hills. "You don't think he's going to give up the good ones without a fight, do you?"

"If we don't kill everything for two hundred miles the disease will spread again."

"Tell him that," Mike said.

I went into my spiel about how we had to kill all the cattle from ocean to ocean and make sure the disease was stamped out, that there was no cure, that we were paying for the cattle, and all that. He nodded and agreed and assured me that he understood and that surely, the government was looking out for the welfare of the rancheros and so on. He agreed that it was a shame that all the fine cattle had to be killed off but it was unavoidable and in the long run the rancheros would benefit by it when all cattle in the district were healthy, new thoroughbred stock brought in, and so on for twenty flowery minutes.

I was out of breath but I congratulated myself on getting the idea across. It tickled me that I could make myself understood by this simple son of the soil when Mike who had been born and raised in the same country couldn't do it. Some of my smugness must have been visible. Mike gave a little sideways grin and turned to don Nepomuceno. "Now will you tell us where the other eighteen head are?"

"But don Miguel," Nepomuceno protested in round-eyed innocence, "I had but thirty head."

Mike shrugged and we left.

That night I asked him what he intended to do about it.

"What would you do?" he asked.

"Go out and find them."

He laughed and poured another tequila con limón.

"I really prefer cold beer," he said. "But considering the lack of ice and other niceties of civilization, I think we're fortunate that the art of distilling has penetrated these fastnesses."

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I poured an ounce of tequila, put salt on the flat spot made by clenching thumb and finger together, and picked up a slice of lemon. The trick is to lick the salt, gulp the tequila, and bite the lemon. Carried off in one fluid motion, it tastes no worse than paint remover.

"To get back to your idea," Mike said, "have you any ideas of how big the range is up in that sierra?"

I looked at him and said nothing.

"A general once took his division up there. He was chasing bandits."

"And?"

"Search me. Nobody ever came out."

"You kidding?"

"I swear it by my mother," Mike said so I knew he wasn't. No Mexican ever kids about his mother.

The next day we took another trail and saw another rancher. Same story all over again. I could swear they were telling the truth. So eager to please, such simple, good-hearted folk. I kept thinking about how we ornery whites had done the Indians out of everything and all the time I was paying out Uncle's money for their cull cattle, the ones they'd have killed anyway if I hadn't come along to pay for the privilege.

Mike just laughed. He didn't take the campaign seriously. One day I went up in the hills to find some of the hidden cattle. After seven or eight hours I had to give it up as a bad job. It gets cold in the tropics at night, sitting around a fire with only a serape for warmth. I felt kind of foolish next morning when I stumbled on Mike and a search party.

After that I began taking it easy. Once in a while we'd go out to shoot a few cattle and hand out some money. The rancheros began to thaw. I started getting invitations. It's amazing what a high old time you can have with a guitar, a fiddle, and the neighborhood girls all turned out in their Sunday best. Even so, a dance was all I ever got.

Mike had his eye on one of don Nepomuceno's daughters but I knew he didn't have any serious intentions. A man of Mike's standing just doesn't marry an Indian ranchero's daughter. Since I was a foreigner, I didn't have any exact position on the social scale. I could overlap and if I did something wrong there was always the excuse that I didn't know any better.

With weather that never changed and the tequila con limón I started losing track of time. Mike didn't. One day I noticed it enough to ask what was eating him.

"Mail," he said.

"What's wrong?"

"There hasn't been any since before you came. I'm expecting batteries."

He had a portable radio but the batteries had fizzled out in the middle of a Russian ultimatum two

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days after I arrived. At first I'd missed it. Now I was in the habit of listening to the local boys play their guitars. They weren't crowding Segovia but they did their best. That's more than I could say for some musicians I knew back home.

These boys couldn't read. They didn't know Hemingway from hemorrhoid but they played and they sang. Nobody ever gave them lessons but they expressed their immortal souls. I guess that's Art.

Mike worried about the mail. He didn't just want batteries. We were starting to run out of money. I wondered what would happen to our social standing when Uncle and the República Mexicana failed their joint representatives on the aftosa commission. Mike was wondering too. Although he was Mexican, Mike was as much of a foreigner to these people as I was.

"What are we going to do?" I asked.

"I don't know," Mike answered worriedly. "Mail isn't exactly regular but this is the longest I've ever seen it miss."

"I don't like to repeat myself but what are we going to do?"

"Somebody on my side must have pulled a bubu," Mike said.

"So?"

"It's a sad truth that a prophet is without honor in his own land. You're a gringo. If you go down to the railroad and send some telegrams you'll get results. If I went I'd accomplish nothing."

I thought he was trying to push off a dirty job on me but after I thought it over I knew he was right. In the morning I packed a saddlebag. Going down wasn't as bad as the trip up. I'd been riding Balaam for several months and my tail bone had a few calluses.

After an hour in the little depot, waiting for the train, it finally percolated through my head that something was wrong. I began to notice the dust. It lay in thick layers over everything. I looked outside and the rails were rusty. It wasn't the thin bright rust that forms in a few hours with the tropical rain. These rails were caked like steel that has been rained on for months without a wheel to shine it. I climbed aboard Balaam and we started down the tracks toward the city. When I found a gasoline speeder a few miles down I hobbled Balaam. The battery was pretty weak but there was a crank.

There were wrecked locomotives every forty or fifty kilometers. I had to abandon one speeder and handcar after another as I detoured around the wrecks. In Guadalajara the stores were open but nobody was tending to business. The groceries had been pretty well picked over; rats always survive. I lived on what canned goods hadn't rusted through yet. After scrounging about a bit I found four cases of blasting gelatin and opened the vaults of the Banco del Occidente.

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You read stories about the end of the world and everybody knows money's no good. Everyone wants weapons or food or some such thing. I was crazy. I got thirty million pesos. You'd have thought I was crazy if you'd seen the Thank God look on Mike's face. He'd been spinning a pretty thin line of bull while I was gone.

I told him how things were. He didn't believe me. When he came back a month later he seemed to be bleeding internally. Not literally, understand, just sort of stunned. I poured some tequila and handed him the salt and lemon. After ten rounds he could talk.

"I went home," he said heavily. "My mother, my father, my sisters . . ."

"I know. I had some too."

"What happened?" he asked.

"It wasn't your country pulled the bubu; it was mine."

For an instant I thought he was going to kill me then he sat down again and we poured ourselves a couple more tequilas con limón.

The next day we went out to see don Nepomuceno. He gave us the fisheye but when I opened the saddlebags he thawed out in a hurry.

Swindlers, you say? Didn't we pay for everything? Just because Mike bought a ranch and took a wife—

So what if I did the same. Between Mike and me we own this town. When we walk down the street people take off their hats and smile and say, "Good morning, don Jaime, good morning, don Miguel."

Benefits of civilization my bleeding fistula! Make up your own mind. If you want to stay we'll give you a million pesos and a land grant. If you can't keep quiet then go back down where money's no good. Take your rifle and steal another jeep and take your chances with the wild men down below. Up in this town God's in his heaven and all's right with the world. We intend to keep it that way.

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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

THE FIRSTFRUITS OF SCIENCE FICTION book publishing in 1957 seem to indicate that the quality of new novels will be markedly above that so dejectedly reported, last month, in my survey of 1956. Novels by Heinlein and Asimov stand well above any new adult entries of last year; and coming up shortly are novels by Alfred Bester, Fredric Brown and Frederik Pohl (and can typesetters get those two erratically spelled Freds right in one sentence?).

Robert A. Heinlein's THE DOOR INTO SUMMER (Doubleday, $2.95) was serialized in this magazine in late 1956 and therefore can hardly be impersonally covered by this reviewer-editor. I can only express my hope that you'll enjoy it as much as I (and countless letter-writing readers) did—along with similar hope for your enjoyment of THE BEST FROM F&SF: SIXTH SERIES (Doubleday, $3.50), which contains 15 stories from F&SF, January-December, 1956.

Isaac Asimov's THE NAKED SUN (Doubleday, $2.95) was being serialized in *Astounding* at the same time that Heinlein appeared here and Bester in *Galaxy*—and I challenge s.f.-historian Sam Moskowitz to name another season when three comparable novels were running simultaneously. THE NAKED SUN is a companion piece to THE CAVES OF STEEL (*Galaxy*, 1953; Doubleday, 1954): a detective story of the future, at once noble science fiction and a purer strict detective problem than 99% of the 300-odd whodunits I read annually for the New York *Times Book Review*. Here we meet again the detective team of Plainclothesman Lije Baley of the New York City Police and R. (for Robot) Daneel Olivaw, who so admirably complement each other, involved this time in as "impossible" a crime as was ever devised by John Dickson Carr.

The planet of Solaria (the only unanswered part of the puzzle is why an almost-infinitely-remote-from-Sol planet has such a name) enjoys an elaborately robotic culture, to such an extent that the small self-sufficient human élite have abandoned human contact. They "view" each other by mobile three-dimensional TV; but actual physical presence is nauseatingly

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unthinkable. How, then, could Solaria witness an act demanding such intimate physical contact as murder-by-bludgeoning?

Connoisseurs of positronic robots will be delighted that Mr. Asimov still, after 15 years, has a few surprises up his sleeve concerning the logical implications of the celebrated Three Laws of Robotics; connoisseurs of women will rejoice in one of the few captivating heroines I've ever encountered in s.f.; and connoisseurs of either science fiction or deductive mystery will acknowledge Asimov as an authentic Master of both disciplines, and pray that in the future it will be much less than three years between appearances of the Baley-Olivaw team.

Other recent novels include two by F&SF's most frequent contributor, Poul Anderson—both interesting, both somewhat below the author's highest potential. STAR WAYS (Avalon, $2.75) is a romantic-transgalactic tale of a nomadic trading civilization which encounters aliens bent on reshaping the Galaxy in their own cultural image. Never serialized, it contains many good scenes and ideas, but the total effect is loose-jointed, as if Mr. Anderson could not decide between his intellectually speculative and broadly swashbuckling moods, and ended up doing justice to neither. PLANET OF NO RETURN (Ace, 35¢) is a very short novel from *Astounding,* 1954, which might have come off better as a novelet. The puzzle posed to an interstellar exploring expedition—how to interpret the contradictory conduct of an unclassifiable native race—is an ingenious and well-solved one, but the ratio of talk to story is high. The same double-book contains a reprint of Andre Norton's effective 1955 thriller, STAR GUARD.

Philip K. Dick has published 3 paperback-original novels in 19 months. The first (SOLAR LOTTERY) was more than satisfactory; but the others show too many signs of haste in derivative notions and inadequately developed themes. THE MAN WHO JAPED (Ace, 35¢) studies a society of 2114 in which Morec—Moral Reclamation, not unsuggestive of today's Moral Rearmament—has Taken Over after atomic devastation; and though the details are largely excellent, the story-line is the good old Pohl-Kornbluth Taking Over plot, complete with rebel hero who sees the Shallowness of It All. The rebel himself is unusual in concept—a man with a sportive (in two meanings) sense of humor in a grimly sobersided world; but, aside from one wonderful climactic scene, Mr. Dick keeps telling us about humor rather than showing us any examples. This time the double-book contains two new, non-reprint novels; the other is E. C. Tubb's THE SPACE-BORN, American book-length debut of a writer well established in Eng-

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land. It's a careful and competent story on the *Universe* theme (the interstellar vessel manned by successive generations to whom The Ship becomes all of creation), with a likely new variant.

The *Universe* motif seems suddenly prevalent. You'll be reading a fresh development by Chad Oliver in this magazine soon; and you'll find few better treatments of the theme than Clifford Simak's *Target Generation,* in Simak's STRANGERS IN THE UNIVERSE (Simon & Schuster, $3.50). You'll be hard put to it, indeed, to find any better solidly detailed yet warmly human s.f. than the 11 stories (from 9 different sources, including F&SF) in this collection—and if 5 of them have been previously anthologized, the volume is so generously proportioned that it still offers over 80,000 words new to book form.

John Wyndham's TALES OF GOOSEFLESH AND LAUGHTER (Ballantine, 35¢) largely overlaps his JIZZLE (London: Dobson, 1954; not published in the U. S.). Its 11 stories (2—both from F&SF—previously anthologized) mingle s.f. and outright fantasy, with a dash of the titular gooseflesh and copious helpings of laughter. Long-term science-fantasy aficionados may protest that many of these caprices are merely amusing restatements of familiar notions; but Wyndham's graceful readability is far more apt to seduce the general reader than many, to the specialist's taste, "better" collections. This is a book to shelve with your volumes of John Collier, Saki and Roald Dahl.

And not too far from that hallowed shelf you might place the new year's first volume of shorts: Arthur C. Clarke's TALES FROM THE WHITE HART (Ballantine, 35¢)—perhaps in the same niche as Lord Dunsany's stories of Jorkens and the de Camp-Pratt TALES FROM GAVAGAN'S BAR. In isolated magazine appearances, some of these scientific tall tales—which are somewhat as if Jorkens were to retell the contents of *Astounding*'s old "Probability Zero" department—have seemed rather thin; but *en masse* they come into their own as a source of delight. The White Hart, that Mermaid Tavern of the Atomic Age, is as grand a place to do your literary drinking—in the company of its astonishingly abstemious author—as Gavagan's in the Village or the Boar's Head in Eastcheap.

If better short (for lack of a better word) stories are being written in today's world than the fables of James Thurber, I have not seen them. FURTHER FABLES FOR OUR TIME (Simon & Schuster, $3.50) contains 47 fables, 37 from *The New Yorker* and 10 hitherto unpublished, and all 47 are perfection, in acuity, in illustration, and in prose—as complexly patterned and allusive as the verse of T. S. Eliot, and at the same time crystal-clear and communicative.

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The fertile mind of Poul Anderson keeps spawning worlds—worlds of scientific development, worlds of alien life, alternate worlds of If-*history, worlds of fantasy and magic—each of them self-consistent and logically developed. The strange world which he creates this time for our pleasure is a sociological world of* If-This-Goes-On, *in which organized crime has swallowed up the organizations of labor and business, and in which a toughly idealistic young man may be a professional gangster with the highest ethical motives. . . .*

License

by POUL ANDERSON

I LANDED AT WOLD-CHAMBERLAIN, ON the edge of Twincity. It was mid-afternoon, but the air was mild—the summer here doesn't really get started till about July, and this was early June. There were the usual taxis waiting for rocket passengers, just inside the crimeless area. I walked down the line till I found one whose polished armor and obviously well-oiled gun turret indicated a driver who knew his business. He jumped to open the door for me: I was wearing my union badge, and we're all supposed to be good tippers.

"YMCA," I said, entering. In the summers I usually lived at the Y; it's nothing fancy, but it's cheap and clean and there are some pretty decent guys around. Most important, you're safe inside.

My cab nosed onto the fourth-level freeway and went on automatic. The driver leaned back and struck a cigaret. "Working?" he asked.

"Not yet," I said.

"You will be," he predicted. "It's been a lively year so far." He jerked his thumb at the framed bootlegging and procurement licenses. "Business is good, you know. I wonder how come the crime rate jumps in boom times and drops in bad times. Sh'd think it'd be the other way around."

"There are psychological reasons," I told him. "You can explain part of it by pointing to all the money floating about—hectic atmosphere and so forth, high living, eat, drink, and be merry. In a slump, you think about eating."

"You don't talk like a gangster," he said.

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"I'm only one in summer," I admitted. "The rest of the year I'm working for my Ph.D. at Harvard. Got to pay my expenses somehow."

He grew less friendly, associating me with college kids, I suppose. I didn't bother explaining that my panty-raiding days were long past and that graduate students are still expected to earn their degree. It had been fun once, but I think maturity consists largely in a shift of the pleasure principle: to me, at the ripe old age of 24, there was delight in a psychodynamic equation and merely boredom in the thought of breaking down doors and toting a squealing coed into the bushes.

We passed a new school, steel and chrome and plastic leaping 80 stories into the sky, and I noticed a gym class having some machine-gun practice on the playground. The range was pathetically overcrowded—where the hell are they going to put all the new children?

"'Y' oughta be here in fall," said the driver. "We got a great team this year."

"I don't care much for football, to tell the truth," I replied. "I see enough bloodshed without paying to watch somebody's face messed up with spiked knuckledusters."

"Oh, the Big Ten are using goggles now—no more blindings. Though there's talk of legalizing switchblades . . . Here we are, doc."

I got out on the ramp. The meter showed $250, which was not unreasonable, but I disliked adding the 25% tip expected of me. People think a gangster sleeps on money mattresses; well, he does get fat fees, but it's sporadic work and he has heavy expenses too.

After I had been frisked and had checked my weapons—I told you the Y is safe—I went over to the desk. Joe Green was there and said hello. "How's things back east?" he added.

"As usual," I said.

"How about that airport bombing?"

"You know I only hold a job summers. I hear the unions and the cops between them got the bastards in a few days, but it was no affair of mine." I said that because I didn't care to make conversation; actually, I had been as outraged as anyone else. Unlicensed murder, and illegal weapons such as bombs—in this case, there were twenty innocent casualties—are an offense to all the rules of human behavior. Without law, we might as well go back to the caves.

"What kind of place you want?" asked Green. "We've added a new wing: some nice three-room—"

"I'm trying to save money. Single with bath will do."

"OK. 2773, then. Want a girl?"

"Not just yet, thanks. I want to take off my shoes and relax. When you get off duty, maybe we can go out for dinner and stuff."

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I picked up a fifth at the newsstand and looked for a book, but there was nothing worth reading. I don't care about their covers, but these impurgated editions annoy me; nobody has a right to put clinical descriptions into *Romeo and Juliet* or provide Captain Ahab with a mistress. Oh, well.

I took the elevator up, entered my place, and checked the meters. Local water ration was 30 gallons a day: Minnesota still has plenty. After the grimy east, it was going to be good to bathe daily. While the tub was filling, I took my fifth over for a look out the window. The downtown area is new and spectacular, from the austere lines of the Retailers' Union skyscraper to the humorous fantasy of the Hamm's Building, shaped like a beer bottle. But I was high enough to see the gray miles of housing projects reaching beyond the horizon. They had expanded since last year, and I could understand why the cab driver had said this was a lively time. Unless we psychodynamicists come up with an answer, the curve of liveliness is going to keep on rising.

I didn't call union HQ till I was cleaned up. The face in the screen was unfamiliar. "Hello, brother," I said. "Charles Andrew Rheinbogen checking in."

"Hello, brother Rheinbogen," he nodded. "You're playing in luck. All the boys out, and a large job just come."

I sighed, having hoped for at least a day's relaxation. But you don't turn down an offer. "OK, I'll be right along. But what happened to Sam?"

"Oh . . . brother Jeffreys, you mean? He got his a week ago."

"Hey, he was too old for anything but switchboard work."

"This was a private murder. Somebody cooled him for personal reasons."

"Damn! I liked him. Anything we can do about it?"

" 'Fraid not. Advance notification of intent was filed, the deed's been registered and the weregild will be paid on schedule."

Well, he'd had a full life, and the union would look after his family. But I was going to miss Sam. He had lived through the Smashup as a young man and, unlike most, always been willing to talk about it. Some of his stories would curdle your plasma, but he had kept his sense of humor too.

I slipped on clean pajamas and shoes and went downstairs. In the lobby I bought a foodbar to keep going on; benzedrine I always carry. After getting my guns back I took the slideway over to HQ on third-level Nicollet. The new operator had not lied about a big job; I was shown into the executive secretary's office at once.

Tom Swanson is a very high-class labor chief, managing not only the local and its benefit funds, but also its banks, stores, factories, and

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other business. He hasn't much formal education, but he looks like a middle-aged professor; that's due to plastic surgery, when he decided a mild, scholarly face was disarming and therefore useful. He shook hands with me and introduced me to the client: "Mr. James Hardy, this is Mr. Rheinbogen—one of our best."

"Um," grunted Hardy. "Rather young, ain't he?"

I do have the misfortune—which will be an asset in about twenty years, if I live—to look like a slender blond sophomore. Maybe that was why I took a dislike to this customer. Or maybe it was his broad, carefully barbered and massaged face, or the overly elaborate hairdo. He made me think of a shark at some Friendly Loan Company where they make you put up your wife's services for a year to borrow a thousand. A bit of investigation next day was to confirm my hunch. However, a job is a job, so I merely sat down and waited.

"Suppose you explain the situation yourself, Mr. Hardy," suggested Swanson.

"Well . . . all right. If you guarantee this boy—"

"The union guarantees nothing except an honest effort to fulfill the mission," said Swanson gently. "If we lose our men on it, you'll need a fresh contract to try again."

"Unless," I said nastily, "you want to try for yourself."

"Don't give me that," snorted Hardy. "I'm a businessman—vice-chairman of the board, Teamsters' Union, Inc. I don't do my own kidnapings any more than I do my own cooking in one of our restaurants." It was a proper come-uppance for me, but I didn't enjoy his tone—arrogance ought to be more courteous, a principle they understood back in the Renaissance.

"So it's to be a snatch," I said. "The season . . . no, wait, kidnaping season did open yesterday, didn't it? OK, who's the goat?"

"A Miss Marie Dulac," he answered. "You've heard of the Dulac family—head of the chemicals union trust. They have a summer home out at Lake Minnetonka and are there now."

I suppressed an impulse to whistle—yanking a girl from the house of her trillionaire father! But there must be a chance of doing it, or Swanson wouldn't have me here. "Seems I've heard of the wench," I said. "But we can't lift her; she's a minor."

"Turned twenty-one last month," said Swanson. "I checked the public records myself. She hasn't taken out first-class citizenship, so she's immune to murder, beating, or criminal assault; but anything else goes."

"How come you want her?" I asked.

"Business reasons," said Hardy.

"I have to know why," I ex-

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plained. "I'll need the whole picture. Professional confidence applies, of course."

"All right," grumbled Hardy. "A simple matter of pressure on her old man. Both our unions are trying to merge with the Federated Nuclear Scientists. If I hold his daughter, he'll back out and let me have them."

That was a very big picture indeed, and I felt more and more cold as I realized how well that house must be guarded. "Any details on the girl herself?" I queried.

"Not too much," said Swanson. "I can't say how she'll react, Charlie, so you'd better handle with care and this side up. The Dulacs are French Canadian, her mother died years ago, and she's been raised in a convent way to hellandgone in Quebec. Only sprung last month, and her debut is going to be pretty soon."

Good. The confusion of preparing an orgy would help me. But old Frederic Dulac hadn't gotten where he was without some hard and shrewd fighting. He was known to be a fair, even gentle boss, but when his goons had to shoot they only intended to shoot once.

Hardy produced the license, and I scanned it carefully to make sure everything was in order. It certified that on payment of the usual (high) fees and filing of the usual notice of intent, he was hereby authorized to kidnap Marie Tamara Dulac within a period of not more than six weeks from date and to hold said person for a period of not more than one year from date, and was further authorized to use such force as necessary and legal on condition of paying the proper weregild for all damage done . . . etc., etc., etc. They had changed the form since I last saw one; there was now a boldface notice that breach of the regulations governing any capital-crime license meant full outlawry—anyone could kill you without penalty, and if the cops didn't get you first the gangsters would for the sake of their own good name.

Hardy had already made a contract with our local. Now he signed the license over to me and I was committed. The fee, I knew, would be terrific, but I wondered what use money is to a dead man.

"You have my card," said Hardy. "You can deliver her to my New Chicago office."

"Nothing doing," said Swanson. "We'll keep her."

"What? But—"

"If you haven't read the union code, Mr. Hardy, it's your own fault. In a case like this, we retain the victim to make sure no harm comes to her. Otherwise we'd occasionally find ourselves accessories to something illegal—torture or white slavery, say."

I was pleased to see Hardy looking apoplectic. It was going to inconvenience him: old Dulac might

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just be tough enough to wait a year till we had to release his girl. No—it would depend on how tough she was; if her father *knew* she could stand a year's comfortable arrest . . .

We got rid of our client after a while and settled down for a drink, smoke, and talk. Everybody knew that Dulac employed the American Freebooters' Laborunion. It's practically a mirror image of our own Criminal Industries Organization. I've bought drinks for many of their boys off duty, and some people wonder why the crooks don't merge. But then attack-defense-riposte would become impossible; you wouldn't fight your own brothers, would you? Dulac had to have his chance to guard or recover his daughter. Competition is the lifeblood of American free enterprise.

A job like this takes information, planning, and rehearsal, and the plan must be imaginative. Some locals rely on games theory computers, but there's still no good substitute for the skilled human brain. A machine can't *enjoy* thinking.

A week later we had our scheme fairly well rigged. Axel Nygard and I made reservations at a lakeside hotel and drove down; the rest of our boys had been trickling into the area for days, under various names and faces. We ourselves didn't bother with surgery, because Intelligence had told us the Dulac goons rarely went scouting. The old man relied on his fortress-like estate, where you didn't get in without a retinal scan and a frisking. Just to add to his confidence, we'd sent a squad that made a deliberately bungled attempt on his home. No casualties except some flesh wounds on our side: if I had been in charge of Dulac's defenses, that would have made me suspicious, but Swanson said his chief goon had an honest, straightforward mind. Both of them were prominent Rotarians, so he ought to know.

It was a pleasant drive once we got past the housing projects. Nygard is a big, burly chap, but he shuddered a trifle as we zoomed through. The tenements rose up on either side of the freeway, they seemed to have faces in every window, and the pedestrian levels below us were like a disturbed anthill.

"Christ!" he muttered. "Can people really live like this?"

"Sure, they're doing it," I told him. "They've got to. Isn't much space left in the world. They're still eating, at least, and there are amusements provided."

"But the crowding—how many people to a room?"

"Oh, not more than three or four. It's normal for them; they don't know anything else. I grew up in a housing project myself, and it really isn't so bad. Of course, my father had a very good job—technician in a rocket factory: for twenty hours a week he was alone in a big

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roomy building with only a dozen other men. So he was a peaceful sort, didn't even take out a crime license. Our neighbors were the usual working stiffs, and beguiled their leisure by robbing each other. Nice people—ever since then, I've wanted to do something constructive for them and their kind."

"It sounds like perpetual motion," said Nygard suspiciously. He was new to gangster work. "Bill robs Joe who robs Pete who robs Bill . . . but dammit, money represents material goods and services. Transferring it that way is just lost energy."

We went by a protein factory, processing the algae from Lake Superior. "Not so," I said. "Work in places like that keeps the belly satisfied. But what makes you a man, instead of another machine, is what you do off duty. The Chinese failed to make the adjustment to the present phase of history, overpopulation *cum* technics, and are huddled up like hogs in a pen. The Russians spend all their time bickering between a hundred religious cults. The South Africans march around with their rifles, knowing the Peace Authority won't let them go beyond their own borders and taking it out on any white person they happen to find." At a distance I glimpsed a man talking to a woman —an obvious hetaera—on an upper-level ramp, while a boy picked his pocket. All three were smiling. "I think we've got it better."

We got out of the city and had only a short drive to Minnetonka. It's a fair-sized lake, and by piping their water from elsewhere they've kept it that way. That's expensive and so are the several acres of trees and the fish they keep the lake stocked with; so it's a high-priced resort, the banks lined solid with hotels and summer cottages and fun houses. Coming in to Dirty Joe's Lodge, we passed the Dulac estate: a fabulous five acres between high walls, the house underground except for a sundeck. Little more than that was known about it, but Dulac had filed intent to shoot down any aircraft besides police or Peace Authority that went over his place, so he must have added guided missiles to his other defenses.

Dirty Joe's was about a mile further down the lake. We turned our car and a $500 tip over to the uniformed attendant and strolled into the lobby to register. The lodge lives up to its name with a backwoods, logging-camp atmosphere —plastic knottypine paneling, only one casino, the girls in the bar putting on their clothes to the accompaniment of folk ballads, and so forth. We were posing as young executives from the politician's union —my studies make me talk like one, and Nygard was taciturn. The bellhop showed us to a 20th-floor room and asked if we wanted girls right away. "Later," I said, testing the taps. The scotch faucet yielded a brand about as good as one can ex-

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pect since the last of the great distilleries was wrecked in those clan feuds.

"Swanson won't like what the local fillies are gonna do to the expense account," said Nygard when we were alone.

"Well, we have to maintain our character for a day or two while we case the joint," I laughed.

Which we did and had a fine time in the process. There was an undercurrent of tension, naturally, a watchfulness and an awareness that in a short while we might be just another three hundred pounds of material for the fertilizer plants. But once you get used to it, once your apprenticeship has scrubbed off nervousness and youth, you are seldom so much alive as when preparing a job. When I got my doctorate, I was going to hang up my guns—another phase of life outgrown—but I'd not be sorry I had worn them.

The rest of our band was elsewhere in the area; we saw them from time to time and exchanged a few quiet signals. It was on a Wednesday morning that I set the machine going with a single call.

As we'd been doing, Nygard and I hired a boat to go out on the lake fishing. We had seen that Marie Dulac went for a swim each day before noon. There were guards in her craft and another boatful next to it, and they never went far from their private beach—nor did they allow anyone else within a hundred feet. The old man was careful, all right; but it seemed unfair to pit artists against him.

The lake was as crowded as usual with boats, their wakes creaming its carefully blued waters, and with swimmers. Overhead there was always the maximum permissible number of rented copters. Today, I knew, one of them was ours—that had taken substantial bribes to arrange—and not at all what it seemed to be.

Nygard and I steered to within fifty yards of the Dulac party and let our motor idle. Marie stood up in the bow of her vessel and peeled off her clothes. She was a tall slim girl with a vivid, tilted face, merry dark eyes, blue-black hair falling below her ears—from afar, I had seen her laughing and decided I liked her. She hit the water in a clean dive and came up whooping, happy just to exist.

"Now?" asked Nygard.

I took a small swallow of whisky, a good relaxer, and nodded. "Have fun," he said.

"Same to you." I was already stripped, and went over the side. We were trailing a net full of cold beer, but there was an additional package in it. Working fast underwater, I got out the aqua equipment, adjusted it to my face, and breathed gratefully. Then I strapped the tank on my shoulders, slipped the paddles on my feet, and buckled a two-gun belt around

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my waist: a .30 automatic and a sonic stunner. We had to assume nobody would notice I didn't come up again after my dive.

I swam easily, untensed, not allowing myself to think the job might go sour. The water was clear, I could see the boats wavering against sun-dazzle above me. Another aquaman glided by, nodding to me. I felt a pulsing as Nygard steered away. His task was to divert attention by having a minor crackup with some other vessel. Then he was to head for the timber before Dulac's men started serious investigations; they would not be gentle if they caught him or any of us.

Now! I saw the two craft, like whales basking. The splintered sunlight made a roof immediately overhead. I slipped upward, a few feet below the surface. Through the water I felt as much as heard the blunt shock of Nygard's collision. There would be angry voices raised for a minute, until urbanity returned with the recollection that a man can always take out a shooting license, and people would be watching—

She trod water, head and shoulders invisible to me, the rest graceful and faintly unreal. I drew my stunner and pulled her down with my free hand. She got a shock dose good for about half an hour and I let the gun sink, having too much else to do. My hands closed off her mouth and nose to keep water out—the metabolism is lowered by sonic so you can go several minutes without breathing—and my feet kicked us toward the middle of the lake.

With luck, I'd have done it quietly enough so that her disappearance wouldn't be observed for several seconds. Without luck . . . but it was pointless to think about that. I worked my legs hard, trying to keep all muscles not concerned at ease, trying to keep my mind calm. The girl's body was cooling fast in my arms, I could feel the chill creep through it, her eyes were open and blank. She wasn't hurt, but I felt guilty, somehow. I told myself that this was the price you paid for being wealthy and having five landscaped acres to roam about in, but she looked pathetically young and murdered.

Here—I stuck my head out of the water, keeping Marie below, and looked around. There was an uproar a hundred yards back, the Dulac boats circling with engines ahowl, goons threshing the lake and cursing, people spilling out of the housegates. The boys in our copter had been watching through binoculars and saw me emerge. They swooped low, churning the water with the airwash, and snaked down a rope. I raised Marie's head into the air, transferred one hand to the cord, and hung on.

A winch pulled me up as the

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copter mounted skyward. I swung like a bellclapper, seeing brief crazy images below me, gaping faces, a guard shaking his fist but not daring to shoot, I heard a siren begin its clamor, then I was drawn up with my cargo and the hatch clanged shut behind me.

That was a special copter. It shed its rotors and a false rear end the moment I was aboard. I hoped they wouldn't do any damage as they fell; it would be a proud record for me if I could pull an important job without having to pay any claims. Our concealed jet-pipe was now free and acceleration tugged at me as we got going.

There were two men here, a pilot and a doctor. The latter bent over Marie and started artificial respiration in case she'd swallowed the lake after all. I shed my aqua stuff, jumped into the gun turret, and peered back. Two copters were lumbering up from the Dulac estate, but now that we were a jet we could show them our heels. What we had to do was shake any radar there might be, then streak for the hideout where Marie was to be kept.

"Nice job." The doctor poked his head into my turret as Minnetonka vanished. "Very neat. I've given her a reviver shot and put some clothes on her. She's fine."

I shivered. "I could use some clothes and a shot too," I said, "though maybe not the same kind of shot."

He took the gun while I obtained the necessary. Marie was strapped into a bunk. She was wearing a coverall which gave her an even younger look, like somebody's kid sister. There was a touch of color in her cheeks and I could see her breathe.

"We're going to stop outside Duluth and transfer to another plane," said the doctor as I resumed my post. "Three gets you five old Dulac has a description and a reward offer broadcast inside half an hour."

"Better not make such odds if you don't have a crooked-gambling license," I grinned.

We were flying illegally low to avoid radar, though of course we had a temporary permit to break traffic rules. Now and then a tree or a building whisked past us. I relaxed, feeling the alcohol glow within me, and fumbled out a smoke.

When I looked through the bubble again, I nearly swallowed the cigaret. There was a regular jet after us, a Delta-wing job with the Dulac colors. "Judas priest!" I yelped. "What happened?"

Our pilot cursed and opened up his engine. That buggy could fly rings around us. But where did it come from? There wasn't a runway long enough for it in—

It neared, I could hear it whistle down the sky, and I made out a hook attachment. The old man had been more careful than we

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realized; there'd been a mother ship up in the stratosphere above his place, piggybacking this one.

Our communicator beeped and the pilot switched it on. I couldn't see the screen from where I was, but the voice came clearly: "You there in that phony! Land or I open fire!"

"Oh . . . it's you, Bob," said my pilot. "How's every little thing?"

"Pretty good, Jack." I gathered our opponent was an off-duty friend of his from the other union, in Dulac's pay. "Damn nice try you made there, but not quite nice enough. Land and turn over the girl, and we'll call it quits; I'd hate to make Martha a widow."

"Oh, I'm not married to her right now," said my pilot. He was being pleasant, stalling for time as we whined northward at 500 per. I knew he must be operating the call button for all he was worth and HQ would be aware of our plight. But it would take time for our interceptors to scramble at Twincity and get here.

The jet walked around us and gave us a burst through the roof. I fired back without hitting anything. "Just a warning, Jack," said the radioed voice.

"Crack us up, and the girl goes too," warned my pilot. "It'd be a shame to hurt her, and I don't think her old man would appreciate your zeal."

"I always liked to take chances," said Bob. "I think I got a way to force you down. But it's dangerous."

"Go ahead and try, then," said my pilot. "I'm a poor man and I need my success bonus."

The jet snarled around in a bone-cracking loop and came at us from the rear. I saw the tracer stream hosing from it, reaching for our control surfaces. It had to pull up in a few seconds, crossing over us, and I gave it a burst in the belly as it passed. My stomach muscles were knotted tight, and I breathed deep and told them to relax. The jet came back for another try. That one chewed up our tail-pipe a little, we lost speed and began to wobble in the air.

"The guy's good," said the doctor. "Maybe you better call it a day, Jack."

"You're the boss, Chuck," said the pilot to me.

I looked out, considering. We were on the fringe of the roadless area that reaches north of Lake Superior into Canada; we'd been flying longer than I realized. Most of it is second growth now, having burned off during the Smashup when people were too busy staying alive to fight forest fires, but it's still one of the biggest parks left on this continent.

The other man could disable us and force a landing, just as he claimed; thereafter, unless our reinforcements arrived before Dulac's—which was improbable—we'd have to give up, since it

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would be illegal to use Marie for a shield. Prolonged resistance endangered everyone's life to no obvious purpose, and there was no disgrace to surrendering before these odds. On the other hand, the success bonus would put me through a good many months of school, and success itself under difficult conditions would raise the fees I could charge. I am no altruist—I want to be well-to-do, see my family grow up with room to breathe—but perhaps I also thought of funds for the psychodynamic research this poor crazy torn-up world so badly needs.

"If you two are willing," I said, "I have an idea." Conversation was delayed while the jet made another pass at us. That time I was lucky and ripped up his rudder; he was still a tiger compared to us, but handled awkwardly now.

"I thought of doing our snatch in reverse," I said. "Skim each of these lakes as we go by. Pretty good tactics anyhow: at his speed, he'll have to pull up sharp if he doesn't want a dunk in the drink. On one of those skims, I'll bail out with the girl. You lead him on for a while, then land if you want to. You'll have nothing to conceal, and our planes'll be along before he or his buddies can get rough with you. Nobody's going to dogfight over an object of search which has disappeared."

"And how about you, Chuck?" asked the doctor, looking worried.

"Lots of hotels around here," I said. "If you play it right, the Dulac gang will think we already transferred the kid somehow and were just decoying them; I shouldn't be molested. I can hoof it to one of the hotels and call HQ to send a plane after us."

"It sounds kind of impossible."

"A man might try," I said. "Take the gun."

I went down into the body and stuffed my pockets with foodbars. Boots for me and the girl I hung around my neck. She was warm again to the touch, breathing slowly and easily. I unstrapped her and dragged her over to the hatch and squatted there with her in my arms. Every time we swooped or swerved, she was flung against me, which was not at all unpleasant. Even when a line of holes was stitched across the wall, I rather enjoyed myself.

Choosing the third downward rush at random, I eased the hatch open. The water looked cold and brown; I thought it was filthy till I realized nobody had put bluing in it. A chill shriek of air buffeted up at us. Marie stirred and mumbled, her eyelids fluttering.

When we were a yard above the lake, I stepped out.

We went under like a dropped stone. I clawed my way back to the surface and raised Marie's head. She began to squirm as consciousness returned. I shook the

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water from my eyes and stared out over the lake. It seemed horribly desolate, rimmed in with pine and spruce, no trace of man except the two planes vanishing over the treetops. We'd been dropped close to shore and not seen: the opposing pilot had enough to think about, maneuvering his lame ship and crippling ours without killing our prisoner.

A few strokes brought the muddy bottom under my feet. I waded to shore and dropped Marie Dulac on a dense brown carpet of needles. She choked, sputtered, and sat up.

"Here," I said, extracting a pocket flask.

She took it, shakily, and got down a gulp. Her eyes widened, and she was white and shivering, but I liked the fact that she didn't scream.

"Better get those wet clothes off," I suggested. "They'll dry pretty fast with this breeze, but you might catch cold from it."

"I've been immunized," she said in a small hard voice. She sat for a while looking across the choppy dark bareness of the lake. "Where are we?"

I shrugged. "Somewhere in the Arrowhead."

"I've been kidnaped, yes?" She had a faint, charming hint of Canuck accent.

I bowed. "Charles Rheinbogen, at your service, miss. Now if you'll excuse me—" I slipped off my garments. After a moment she did the same thing. Even at close range and without cosmetics, she was good-looking.

"Do you have a cigaret?" she asked.

"Mmmm . . . we're not supposed to smoke here, you know; it's summer and these trees haven't been fireproofed."

"Please. I'll be careful."

Swanson was always harping on the need for courtesy, among other professional standards. "Very well," I smiled, and groped in my jacket where it lay. She moved closer. Her hand shot out and yanked my gun from its holster.

I caught the movement in time to snatch it away from her. Her features blazed at me. I laughed, put the weapon aside, and got out the cigarets. "Still want that smoke?" I queried.

"Y . . . y-yes." I struck it for her and she inhaled raggedly and coughed. She had probably just been introduced to the vice. Holy Hermes, patron of thieves, she must still be a virgin!

"Look, Miss Dulac," I said, "you have nothing to fear. You're under the protection of the law and of my union. All we're going to do is keep you for a while in a certain place with an adequate staff and all facilities. I'm sorry to put you to this indignity, but there was no choice." I told her how the job had been carried out. "And

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I wouldn't advise your trying to escape," I finished. "It would be more trouble for you to do so than it would be for me to find you again. As far as that goes, if you haven't had a good deal of practice, a pistol is an awkward weapon and you'd be lucky to hit a whale broadside on."

She sat thinking for a while, her cheeks flushed and her dark head bent down. Somewhere a bird began chirping. There were big puffy clouds over us, the sun walking between them.

"Why have you done this?" she asked finally.

"Nothing personal about it, I was hired."

"By whom?"

"I can't tell you that. Professional ethics."

"Ethics!" she spat. Her eyes lifted and challenged me.

"Certainly. And be glad we have them, too. Otherwise anything could happen to you. As it is—"

"I know!" She stood up and looked at me as if I'd crawled from beneath some abandoned garbage grinder. "It's ethical to knock me out, and humiliate me, and endanger my life. It's ethical to let my father worry himself sick—*ugh!*"

I said in my best persuasive tone: "Back in the old days, before the Smashup and the reconstruction, there were people who used to kidnap rich men's children—minors, even babies—for ransom. But being amateurs, they often panicked and murdered the victim. Now . . . well, if you and your father can both stand your being detained for less than a year, you'll go free, unharmed, and he won't have to yield a thing."

She looked thoughtful. "May I write him?" she asked.

I was surprised. She actually, automatically talked of writing a letter instead of making a call. That convent must be a pretty old-fashioned sort of school; I'll bet it even insisted all the kids learn to spell the same way. "Sorry, no," I answered.

"But you don't understand. I've hardly seen him, except on holidays, till last month. He'll be ill with worry . . . about how I take this . . . if I could write and let him know I can stand it without mental damage—"

"Exactly," I said. "There'd be no point in snatching you if it didn't bring pressure to bear on him. After all—"

"Oh, be still!" she snarled, and turned her back.

I hunkered on the soft brown needles and squinted across the lake and tried to figure her. She wasn't reacting like others I'd heisted. Women, especially—either hysterical or "Goodness gracious, how thrilling!" Marie was concerned about her father and just plain boiling-over mad about herself.

After a while the neolon was

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dry, and we resumed our clothes and chewed a couple of foodbars. It was an effort for me to follow her casual example and drink from the lake . . . sure, unpolluted, but *untreated*. I had a queasy feeling afterward. The water tasted wild.

"Well," she said scornfully, "now what?"

"I guess we strike out till we find a hotel or ranger station," I decided. "We'll head due north by the sun. Bound to find something." As a bold bad bandit, I seemed to be cutting a rather lame figure.

She nodded and we started walking. The trees were high and grave about us; the forest floor, springy and open, muffled our boots; sunlight was spattered through the branches. Once I saw a live squirrel scoot up a tree. I nudged Marie and pointed it out. She nodded again, frigidly.

To hell with her.

The sun finally sank, molten gold behind the woods. There was a wind that snickered in the pines. "Don't tell me we'll have to sleep out," I groaned.

"It seems that way." Did I catch a bare overtone of gloat?

Our majestic trees began to look like black misshapen witches, much too tall and thin. "Perhaps I made a mistake," I said. "We could have waited where we were. My own people would probably have backtracked, looking for us, after they'd gotten rid of yours."

A smile curved her lips. "I thought of that," she said.

"Then for God's sake why didn't you tell me?"

"You're in charge, aren't you?" I have never heard so demure a voice.

Despite the law, I wanted to build a fire for the night. I'd have been glad to attract a ranger and pay the fine; at the very least, there would have been warmth. After some futile fumbling with green twigs, it was getting so dark that I had to quit. Marie had put her time to better use, cutting off slender spruce boughs with my pocketknife and making herself a bed. Now she stretched out on it, a blur in the dusk.

"Hadn't you better put that heap on top of you?" I asked. "It's going to be cold."

"If you have only one cover, sleeping out, it works best beneath you. I have often been camping. You will learn."

"Hm," I said. "Frankly, I thought you'd spent all your time in the chilly cloisters."

She fairly threw at me: "It was like old days up there—a little village, honorable men who lived off the land, a few people who really cared to know things and knew learning means work. The sisters and the villagers were more human than you are, Mr. Rheinbogen!"

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I think I surprised her by taking no offense. "I realize that," I said with a dim sadness. "They were . . . are . . . the lucky ones."

"Then why do you live by—by killing and stealing and—"

"I'm afraid I wasn't born to be a child of nature. And I have my own work to do, you know."

"Your *work!*"

That was all the goodnight I got.

There was no danger that I would sleep so unwarily well that she could turn the tables. Not with the ground cold and damp and hard beneath me. I swore to myself and shifted position and counted up my separate aches. Ye gods—this was the natural life?

Sometime after midnight, the monotonous clatter of my teeth must have lulled me. I was wakened from a fitful doze by a bang that shuddered in the earth. Fire burst over the sky, and then God opened the taps up there.

We scrambled to what shelter we could find, under the heavy branches of a low spruce. The rain sheeted, blown on a skirl of wind, roaring in the needles, runneling off the ground. The flickering white lightning lit all the world, a moment's sharp reality and then clamping darkness again, on and off, on and off; thunder went booming down endless hollow wastes.

Marie huddled against me, not scared but seeking warmth. In a moment's blue-white lividness I saw that she was smiling. And after a while I felt the same grin on my mouth. This was a wonder, it was the real cosmos breaking loose and roistering across the sky; I could not only realize intellectually, but *feel*, what ants we were, crawling over our mudball planet in a raw blaze of stars, and the knowledge was not terrifying but a sort of drunkenness.

Presently the thunderstorm rolled beyond us and we stood in a slackening rain. It felt strangely gentle and soothing after that heavenly hooraw. We were wet and cold and rather hungry, but the show had been so good that we didn't mind much.

"You know," I said, "now I really understand what they mean when they talk about man being a forest animal. Ultimately all our art must go back to . . . this."

Marie's voice came quizzical out of shadow, above the rain-plash: "You don't talk like a gangster."

"How should I talk?" I chuckled. "We're professional men, not walking clichés."

"Well"—surprisingly, she laughed—"you do seem to have more interests."

I explained that I was only a hood as a means of putting myself through school. "Someday I'm going to be a peaceful psychodynamics research man, looking for a scheme to reconcile the fact that three and a half billion people on

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the Solar System's single habitable planet need technology to stay alive, with the fact that technology requires them to live under conditions for which they aren't biologically fitted. A better scheme than any we now have, I mean." I looked out into the running gloom. "It can't go on this way forever. The present system is frankly meant as a stopgap."

"My father . . ." She hesitated.

"Yes?"

"My father said something like that a few days ago. He felt it was not right that we should have three separate houses while his workers were cooped into one room per family; and yet he would go crazy if he did not have space, and be unable to direct the chemicals union, and so there might be no artificial fertilizers and the workers would starve."

"Your father is a wise man," I said.

"But it's so unfair!"

"The universe never signed a contract with man requiring it to be fair. The old Jews knew that—read the Book of Job. Even you Christians don't imagine the wrong will be redressed in this life."

She made no answer. We stood there while the rain ended and the clouds broke up and grayness became full sunrise. Then we had a bite to eat and started north again.

My unaccustomed body was tired, sore, and chilled. But that disappeared as we walked through the morning. I breathed unfouled air and saw no swirl of gaping faces around me; a Canada jay was a vivid streak of blue against the dark spruce-green, a brook belled its way over mossy stones, something which Marie called a thrush whistled liquidly, unseen.

"It makes me wonder what possessed man to stop hunting and grub his food out of plowed dirt," I said.

Marie looked at me. We had not spoken for hours, but it had not been an altogether hostile silence. "The food was more secure . . . more certain," she ventured.

"Only in bad hunting territory," I answered. "Which, of course, was where agricultural civilization was invented—of necessity." I like to hear myself talk, and in any event I wanted to make a good impression on this girl, justify myself if possible.

"Oh, there were reasons to become civilized, yes," I continued. "The power, the gadgets . . . Nevertheless, for almost a million years man was a hunter. He's still evolved for it, biologically and psychologically. His eyes are most sensitive in the yellow-green, the color of sunlight filtered through leaves. His feet are meant for a yielding surface, it's pavement which flattens them. His body wants to sleep when it's eaten a full meal, and otherwise run around freely. His soul wants the

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excitement of the chase and the kill, it wants a feast afterward, rejoicing, the intimacy of a tribe . . . and the chance to be alone, too, sometimes. All this is instinctive.

"None of him wants to be crowded together, and chained to one tiny spot of the earth's surface, and be an anonymous unit, bossed and herded and jammed into an iron desert of a city, subordinating food and sleep and digestion and love and play to a single monotonous job. He's not built for it, his whole organism revolts against it. And yet nowadays we haven't any choice, we can't go back."

"Go back to the happy savage?" she jeered.

"I'm not a Rousseauist," I said. "The savage does have an impoverished, frightened, hard-working, and short life. Civilization does have fantastically wonderful potentialities, if only we can realize them. But it has drawbacks too!"

We went on in silence for a bit. Then she shook her head. The breeze ruffled her short black hair.

"What you call civilization isn't," she said. "You seem to think it means killing and stealing and tyranny."

"But it does," I answered. "Civilization is an objective concept referring to a certain level of technology and a certain type of social organization. It has very good results—medical science, for example. It also has toxic by-products, the ones you mentioned."

"It doesn't have to."

"I'm afraid it does. Read your history. By and large, it's one long agony—now isn't it?

"It's a matter of scientific record that those primitive peoples who survived long enough to be studied were, on the whole, much more decent than any civilized race. If war existed at all, it was a game rather than a butchery contest. Theft, murder, rape, sadism, insanity, were rare. Their morality may not have been that of the Decalogue, but they stuck closer to it than we've managed to stick to our own codes."

"And so you think the Ten Commandments are wrong?" asked Marie.

"Not at all," I said. "An admirable ideal, but so far only workable for primitives. Being civilized, we're too full of tensions and hatreds to abide by it without a real effort—too great an effort for most people to make consistently. From petty chicanery and backyard malice, up to world war and the Almighty State, civilized man has to hurt his neighbor."

We came out on the shores of another lake. Squinting against the sunlight sharded on the water, I saw a building on the farther side, a long low thing of tinted plastic. I felt a sagging within myself . . . the adventure had ended. That lodge seemed like blasphemy, standing there blatant in the woods.

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Well . . .

"We'll go and call my HQ for transport," I said. "Please don't make it necessary for me to confine you while I do."

Marie's lips clamped together again. She went unspeaking by my side as we started around the lake.

"Take us a while to get there," I said inanely. "It's been a pleasant trip, hasn't it?"

No answer. "Look," I said, "I'm only an agent. I'm terribly sorry to cause you this trouble. But it's not much different from being a cop and giving you a ticket for speeding, is it?"

Her voice was hard and remote: "The policeman is protecting us. You're preying on us."

"Believe it or not," I said, "I'm upholding the law. I exist for the public safety."

"Oh, you're very smug about it," she cried. "You have your license, you keep your greasy paws off me . . . thanks for that much!"

"If it weren't for the likes of me," I said, "you could well have been snatched by someone who would not feel bound to keep his paws off you. Or let's think about the Peace Authority."

Her cheeks burned, but instead of swinging at me she couldn't help arguing. In some ways she was too intelligent for her own good—but a man would never be bored in her company. "The Smashup was too much," she said. "People finally had it knocked into their heads what war means, and the Wastelands are still there to remind them. Don't you go taking credit for the Authority!"

"Oh, but I do. Consider, as merely one example, German history *after* the Thirty Years' War. People never learn. Ruins, Wastelands, historical records, memoirs, warnings, mean nothing. The Peace Authority is possible only because we've found a better outlet than war, at least a less harmful one, for the evil in man."

"But man is not evil," protested Marie. "He's born to sin, yes, but he has the possibility of grace."

"Maybe 'evil' was the wrong word," I agreed. "Let's say, rather, the hatred in him which comes from being civilized.

"Just before the Smashup, psychodynamics had developed to the point where this could be shown to be a fact—that most men, if not all, hate their civilization, subconsciously but intensely; and that the hatred must be vented somehow. The old-time professional soldier, like the modern professional gangster, was usually a kind, friendly man because his tensions were discharged in wartime. But society can't afford war any longer.

"It was too late to prevent the Smashup, and civilization was lucky to survive. The destruction, chaos, and suffering of it vented so much wrath that people were fairly peaceable for a decade afterward. That made it possible to institute

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legalized, regulated crime, as the necessary safety valve. It also, incidentally, abolished such cold-blooded wasteful fiendishness as locking sound men into cages for one mistake—and, through the institution of outlawry, has begun slowly to eliminate the incredible fatheadedness of turning congenital psychopaths loose on parole. But that's minor. Even the fun involved—and it *is* fun—is secondary.

"You seem to be more at peace with yourself than most, Marie; you could live happily in a crimeless, warless world. But very few people can. So we give them crime, and a touch of freedom and color and adventure in their lives, instead of war.

"Therefore I insist, Marie, that in my own way, I'm upholding the law and making the world a little safer, a little cleaner. And someday I can have a hand in finding a better answer than this."

I stopped, quite hoarse from my oration. There was a summery quietness, and we walked through it for a mile or so. We rounded the lake and found a path leading to the lodge.

"You may be right," said Marie at last, very softly.

My heart gave an irrational jump. It shouldn't matter what a victim thought of me, but in this case it did.

Her eyes turned somberly up toward mine. "But I have a right too," she said, "and my father does."

"I'm sorry for him," I replied sincerely, "and for you. But aristocracy has always had its penalties as well as its privileges."

"You . . . you're not the sort I imagined you were . . . not the sort to cause needless pain. You could let me go—"

I bit my lip. "I could. But I won't."

"Why not? If it's the money, you'll be paid ten times over; I swear it."

"No. It's a matter of—" I laughed, rather sadly. "Honor. May I use that word? I undertook to do a job, and my brothers are depending on me to do it. I can't blacken their name. It's socially important, too—I want to see more and more people delegate their crimes to us pros. We can do it less messily, more considerately; and it helps get our customers out of the habit of violence."

"But—you would work for that *cochon?*"

"The fellow who hired me? I don't like him one little bit. I wish to God your father had hired me against him. But yes, having given my word, I'll do his job to the best of my ability."

Gravel scrunched underfoot.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"If he could know how it is—!"

"I'll gladly take a crack at him after this episode is over."

"After he has gotten what he

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wants from my father, and is on his guard—" She turned her face. I saw her stiffen.

I walked on in anguish. It wasn't right, it wasn't fair. She was too much alive to be penned away for months; she would come out of it with her own tensions built up, already I could see it happening, another civilized creature with civilized hate to discharge on someone else. Wasn't I trying to build a society where no one loathed his fellow man, where folk worked together not because they were told to but because it was their free will? I had a member of that future right here, beside me, and I was going to ruin her for the sake of that same future. It didn't make sense.

We came up to the lodge. Its wealthy guests stared at our sunburnt griminess from their lounging chairs and their cocktail terrace. I wanted to stuff every fat belly in the place with lead.

Shifting my gun conspicuously near my hand, I took Marie into the lobby. "I'm on a job," I said to the clerk. "Want to make a call from here."

"Yes, sir, yessir, rightthiswaysir!" He jumped to it. I was disappointed, needing an excuse to bully someone. We were shown into the office and left in privacy.

I didn't dial HQ—our lines were undoubtedly tapped by Dulac's goons—but a laundry in Duluth. Our agent there relayed the call through a scrambler to Twincity. It took a minute or two to raise the operator at that end.

Waiting, I lit a cigaret and slumped. "We'll have a plane here for you in half an hour," I said. "That'll finish my part of the job."

She didn't reply, but stood behind me. I could hear how fast she breathed.

"You'll doubtless say no," I went on, "and I'll not blame you . . . but may I come see you in the hideout, now and then?" When she still made no answer, I smiled on one side of my mouth. "At least let me buy you a proper breakfast here. It's all on the expense account."

The screen lit up before she could respond. I was put through to Swanson at once, and told him briefly what had happened.

"Good boy!" he said warmly. "That was a beaut you pulled—it'll go down in the annals, believe me. We'll get a plane up there right away."

"No hurry," I said without tone. "No hurry at all."

"Ah . . . so. How well I understand." Swanson bowed in the screen. "Miss Dulac, my deepest apologies. I assure you—"

"Never mind that." She drew a long breath and leaned over my shoulder, brushing me. Maybe it was just hunger, but I felt a little dizzy at that. Her voice was crisp tight, with a bare hint of laughter. "Let me say something first."

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"By all means, Miss Dulac. We aim to please."

"I have a job for you myself. I want a kidnaping done."

I distinctly heard my jaw click against my Adam's apple.

"What?" Swanson recovered himself and sputtered: "But this isn't—it's never been—"

"I insist on my civil rights," snapped Marie. "Merely being a prisoner hasn't removed them. I have as much right to take out a license and sign a contract as anyone else."

"Ah . . . to be sure . . . but—"

"We can settle it right here when your man comes. I want you to kidnap the one who had me kidnaped."

"But we can't—we're *working* for him!"

"Are you, now? You contracted to do one task for him. You have done it. Aren't you now free to—"

"Well . . . let me think . . . yes, Chuck is under his contract and therefore can't operate against him till it expires. But anyone else in the union—Wait a minute!" The sparkle faded in Swanson's eyes, "You can't sign a John Doe warrant, you know. You have to name the person you want heisted, and we can't tell you who he is."

She made an impatient gesture. "My father is no fool. When the notice of intent was served on me, I asked him who might be responsible and he explained how his affairs stood. Let's say, then, that I want the—what you call it—snatch put on one James Hardy of New Chicago. The ransom requirement will be that he, ah, arrange my release." She paused, frowning. "And, yes, that he pay your fees for this job."

Swanson leaned back in his chair and gasped with laughter.

We sat on the cocktail terrace, watching sunset smolder into the lake. There was a muted buzz of conversation, clink of glasses, whisper of music around us. I didn't mind, indeed I felt quite kindly toward my fellow guests.

I raised my own glass. "To success," I said.

Marie nodded and touched mine with hers. Our shysters had pushed the license, notice, and contract through in a hurry, and we were now awaiting news. Under the circumstances, I had declared that this lodge fulfilled the conditions of a hideout and that we could just as well detain the girl here as elsewhere. It had been a good three days; I'd never had better ones.

"You're a strange man, Charles," she murmured. "The soul of honor about your profession, yes, but you helped me with a great deal of legal hairsplitting."

"I had to see that everything was drawn up in proper form," I said virtuously. "It's the duty of all citizens to respect the law."

"The letter of the law, anyhow,"

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she grinned. "But you were wearing such shining armor when we first met."

"Armor is not very comfortable," I said. "I'd only wear it for someone like you."

Her eyes darkened and she shivered. "It is bad to think that you could be killed next time."

"I have to make a living. Several years to go yet before I can make it doing research."

"My father . . ."

"Yes?"

"When I tell him how it was . . . He likes a clean fighter. He would be glad to offer you a summer position, one that paid well."

"Sorry. He employs our friendly rivals. I couldn't fight my own brothers."

The waiter oozed up with a phone extension and laid it on the table. "Call for you, sir." I lowered the privacy hood; in order to see the little screen under it, Marie and I had to have our heads together.

Swanson looked minutely out at us. "All done, boy," he said. "Hardy was still in town. He'd figured Dulac himself put the bee on him, and wasn't looking for trouble from us. We lifted him right out of his hotel room, and you should have heard him squawk! He's met the terms, though—had to, if his enterprises weren't to go to pot in his absence. You can take Miss Dulac home now."

"Shucks," I grinned, above a certain desolation, "You needn't have been in that kind of a hurry."

Swanson shook his head. "It's an unprecedented business, this," he muttered. "It never happened before that a gang union acted against somebody who was employing one of its own members. There are going to be ICC hearings, and lawsuits, and—Lord knows what'll come of it."

"That," I said, "is one reason why it's fun to be alive. I can rent a copter here—never mind sending a plane for us. Cheerio."

The hood lifted. Marie and I regarded each other for a long while. "I hope you'll at least stay for dinner," I said.

"Oh, yes. I should forego a genuine charcoal-broiled yeast mignon?" She laughed joyously and rose. "I'll just call my father now—be back at once, *mon ami.*"

I had time for some moody and lonesome thoughts while she was gone, there in the twilight under the Japanese lanterns. She found me a poor companion on her return. "But what is wrong?" she asked.

"Never mind," I said. "Or . . . Oh, the deuce with it. I was just thinking that I'll take you home in a couple of hours, and I can't accept that job you offered me, and there's an end of it."

"But who said anything about a gunman's position?" she asked in surprise. "Your psychodynamics

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has its uses in industry, no? You know enough already to hold down a well-paid summer job, and . . ." Her voice trailed off. "If you wish to cease being a gangster," she concluded uncertainly.

I twirled the glass in my hands. It was no easy choice. I hadn't counted on hanging up my guns for years. I needed enough hunting to satisfy my instincts for the rest of an uneventful life—

But hell! Wasn't research a hunt? Had Newton or Darwin or Einstein ever felt the need to kill and steal? Hardly. They were after bigger game.

I lifted the glass and finished my drink.

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Mr. Novotny's keenly developed sense of the absurd illumines the dilemma of a stubbornly monogamous husband involved with a contest in which Beauty Queens are not the contestants . . . but the prizes.

Second Prize

by JOHN NOVOTNY

IT WAS A TUESDAY NIGHT WHEN Helen of Troy was delivered to the Sampsons' home. Terry and Bill Sampson had been reading in bed for an hour or so and were just snapping off their bed lights when the Troy bunch marched into the room. No one bothered to knock. Two soldiers in light armor pushed the door open, stepped in, and stood at attention. They were followed by two others carrying Helen and that lovely creature was in a nasty mood.

"Just watch those hands, Buster," she warned, "and you—Iron Fingers! You're not pulling an oar. You ever heard of being gentle?"

"You want you should fall?" Iron Fingers inquired grumpily.

"Just once," Helen said grimly. "Just try it once. The deepest damned dungeon in—"

"What the hell is going on here?" Bill Sampson demanded angrily, watching two more soldiers crowd in. They were followed immediately by the very short, very round, very jovial Mr. McNulty. Mr. McNulty's blue serge suit and derby hat stood out in sharp contrast to Helen's flowing white robe and the soldiers' armor. He fairly bounced through the door.

"Good heavens!" he beamed at Bill Sampson. "I'm so glad it's you."

"Tell them to go away," Terry whispered, holding the sheet up to her chin. Bill glared.

"If you folks have misplaced a masquerade just turn around and troop the hell out of here," he ordered. Mr. McNulty looked pained.

"Bill boy, you know me," he pleaded. "Why, how many times have you stopped at—" He turned and frowned at Helen, who was still telling Iron Fingers about dungeons. "Will you please stop that infernal noise while I'm speaking?"

"Gladly, Mac," Helen snapped.

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"Just explain to this lout that he's putting black-and-blue marks where I don't care to have black-and-blue marks. Does he think I'm trying to escape? I agreed to this deal and I'll go through with it, but being bruised was not—"

"I'm only holding her up," the soldier said wearily. "Nobody carries anybody upstairs just on the palms of the hands. You have to hold on. And they have some pills out now that do things to the appetite. I say—"

"Your big mouth is going to talk you into an awful hole in the ground," Helen hissed. "I haven't gained a pound in years."

The soldier closed his eyes and sighed. Mr. McNulty held up a warning hand and turned back to Bill.

"How many times have you stopped at the express elevators and talked about the weather before going up to the office?"

"The elevator starter," Bill gasped. "Mac! But what's the idea?"

"You've won!" McNulty shouted happily. "I'll bet I've sold you dozens of chances and now—finally—you've won."

"I've won what?"

"Her." McNulty pointed and Bill stared at Helen as the soldiers placed her on her feet.

"Thank God," she muttered, arranging her flowing drapes.

"Tell them to go," Terry whispered. Mr. McNulty clapped his hands and the two soldiers left Helen, walked over, and gently hauled Terry from the bed. She screamed and Bill howled as he prepared to dive after her. The other two soldiers restrained him.

"Easy now," Mr. McNulty said softly. "She won't be hurt. But it would be more fitting—more proper, if she were kept downstairs for awhile."

"Until when?" Bill asked, watching the door close behind the soldiers and Terry.

"Until you've been awarded your prize."

"You're joking when you say she's the prize, Mac," Bill pleaded hopefully. "You're joking."

"Good heavens, boy! Don't you read the ticket when you buy a chance?"

"I never win," Bill said sadly. "I stopped reading them a long time ago."

"Tch tch," McNulty clucked. He walked to the bureau and extracted a white slip of paper from Bill's wallet. Bill accepted it reluctantly.

"First Prize: Helen of Troy," he read unbelievingly. *"For the benefit of the All Ages Irish Society."*

"Vice president, this century," Mr. McNulty smiled, bowing proudly. "We'll leave you now. Just knock on the door."

Mr. McNulty herded the other soldiers through the bedroom door and shut it. Bill looked at the lovely blonde woman and swallowed hard.

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"I'd never have bought the chance if I had known," he said haltingly. Helen's exquisite brow clouded over.

"That's a pretty lousy thing to say," she answered, studying him closely. "Is your name really Sampson?" Bill nodded.

"Well, Buster," Helen grinned. "You're no prize yourself. But you've got a hell of a publicity man. I've heard some stories about you—"

Bill shook his head.

"Not that Samson."

"Oh." Helen sat down on the small bedroom chair. "Do you mind if I take off these sandals? They're killing me."

"Go right ahead," Bill said quickly. "Terry—my wife, that is—she has the same trouble."

"You don't say. What does she do about it?"

"Nothing," Bill said. "Insists on buying the same size shoes."

Helen laughed approvingly.

"Good for her. But tell her to stay away from this style where the thong comes up between the toes. Coming upstairs, clumsy Gus in front stumbled and grabbed the sole of this sandal. Almost tore my big toe right off. You can imagine what I told him."

"The dungeon?"

"What else? After all, he's supposed to be trained. Say—are you sure you want to go on gabbing like this?"

Bill nodded hastily.

"Oh yes! Wouldn't think of anything else."

Helen thought for a moment and then walked over to the mirror. She studied herself thoroughly and then shrugged.

"It's all right with me, because it is a hell of a trip." She sat on the foot of the bed and Bill settled back against the pillow.

Terry sat on the lowest step with her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands. She could hear Mr. McNulty and the soldiers whispering a few steps above her. Once Mr. McNulty excused himself and squeezed by her to get an ashtray from the living room. It seemed like years later that she heard the bedroom door open. Helen came out and the soldiers stood up. Terry quickly turned back, facing downstairs, and closed her eyes. She remained in the center of the stairway.

"Now let's do better on the way back," Helen said to the soldiers. "Easy. That's it. OK."

Terry felt a slight breeze and, when she opened her eyes, they were gone. As she dashed madly into the bedroom a cold fury slowly pushed all her fears aside. Bill was alseep . . . and smiling.

Bill grinned foolishly as he sparred with the grapefruit.

"You know, hon," he began, "I had one corkin' dream last night."

The opposite side of the table

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was silent. Bill's attention was on the grapefruit.

"I dreamt I finally won a raffle," he went on, carefully hoisting a segment which was still attached at one end. A foot began tapping beneath the table. Foolishly, Bill disregarded it.

"Maybe I shouldn't tell you," he laughed, "but the prize was—"

"—a faded blonde named Helen of Troy," Terry interrupted in a soft deadly voice, "with whom you spent hours in our bedroom while I sat on the stairs."

Bill's mouth, which had opened for the grapefruit, remained open while the grapefruit dove back to its home.

"It was a dream," he said weakly.

"It was a damned dirty dream," Terry shot back. "They carried her in and me out. Out of my own bedroom. For three years I've begged for a washing machine and you waste your money on chances on Helens of Troys."

"I'm sure it was just a dream," Bill moaned. Terry hauled her nightgown up and pointed to a bruise on her thigh.

"Old Iron Fingers," she said. Bill took his head in his hands and shook it fiercely.

"What did they do to you?" he asked. Terry stood up slowly.

"Let us get one thing straight right now," she said. "What happened outside that bedroom door has nothing to do with this discussion. It's the other side of the door that interests me. Start lying."

"What do you mean, 'start lying'?" Bill asked.

"You certainly wouldn't dare tell me the truth," Terry announced. "I'd have my lawyer on the phone in two minutes."

"Your lawyer? We have only one lawyer and he's my lawyer."

"I'll take everything—lawyer and all," Terry sneered. "Even the children."

"Now you're being ridiculous. There are no children."

"Aha! I knew the lies would come," Terry said triumphantly. "How about last night?"

Bill pointed his finger slowly at his wife.

"You have a dirty mind," he said.

"I most certainly have—and it got that way last night."

Bill stood up and walked around the table. He placed one hand gently on Terry's shoulder.

"My dear," he said sincerely, "you have absolutely nothing to—"

"Remove those filthy, philandering fingers!" Terry ordered, sitting very still. "I was waiting for that condescending tone. Guilty as hell! I knew it."

Bill stomped back to his chair.

"Guilty without a trial!" he bellowed. Terry brushed her shoulder and waited. Bill collected his thoughts.

Helen.—Of Troy. The face that launched a thousand— And the body. How come they didn't say more about the body?

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"Why are you smiling—if that sickening expression can be called a smile?" Terry demanded. She slapped the table. "Oh, you're done! Finished! I'm taking the sofa, the silver—"

"I didn't touch her," Bill interrupted weakly.

"Whoosh!"

"I didn't touch her," he insisted.

"Why not?"

Bill hesitated.

"Well . . . she wanted to talk."

Terry frowned.

"That never meant anything to—"

"I wanted to talk too," Bill said quickly.

"That's more like it," Terry agreed. "Probably the first true word you've said this morning. When you're gabby, sex never enters your mind."

Bill stared at her.

"Helen was beautiful. Extremely desirable. But hasn't it occurred to you that I might not even dream of touching her? Haven't you thought that I might just be very much in love with my wife?"

Terry stared back and then lowered her eyes.

"I didn't think of that at all," she confessed unhappily. "I just suspected you."

Bill hurried around and took her in his arms.

"Oh, Bill. If it ever happens again I'll remember. I promise."

"No tears," Bill laughed. "It can't happen again. After all—"

He stopped and Terry felt his body stiffen.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Maybe I have more chances left," he whispered hoarsely. He gingerly extracted his wallet and opened it as if a snake were inside.

"Do you?" Terry asked in a small voice.

He nodded and studied the dates.

"Expired. Expired. Oh no! Expired. Not expired! Three gone. Two to go." He tore up the three for which the date had passed.

"What—who are the prizes?"

Bill gulped as he read the tickets.

"Cleopatra and . . . and Salome," he groaned. "But I've won once. I couldn't possibly win again. To make sure I'll give these back to Mac when I get downtown. I'll explain to him."

"Yes," Terry smiled bravely. "And I'll call Mother this afternoon and explain the whole thing to her."

"To Mother?" Bill asked, astonished. "She'd have me beheaded. You don't explain to anyone. We would—at least I would end up in an asylum. No one, understand?"

Terry nodded reluctantly.

"Not even Sarah!" Bill cautioned.

"But she told me all about her operation," Terry said.

"This is different, Terry darling. Not Sarah, or any of the other neighbors."

"All I ever wanted was a washing machine," Terry grumbled.

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Bill kissed her hurriedly on the cheek.

"I've got to run. I'm late as it is, and I want to see Mac. See you this evening."

Just before shutting the front door Bill called back one more warning.

"Don't even go over to see Sarah today. It will be safer."

"How did you make out?" Terry asked when Bill came home. "What did that horrid man say?"

Bill removed his coat and sank into a chair.

"He wasn't there. That horrid man resigned two days ago."

"The tickets?"

"I tore them up. But I'm sure I couldn't win again, anyway. Think of the odds."

"Think of Cleopatra," Terry said.

"I've been trying not to," Bill said. "You didn't speak to any of the neighbors about this?"

"No," Terry assured him. "But I did use Sarah's washing machine today. It works beautifully."

"That's nice," Bill said. "Supper ready?"

"Are you sure it was today's date?" Terry asked as Bill locked the bedroom door.

"It's engraved in my mind," Bill answered, testing the knob. "Let's not read. Let's go to sleep fast."

"I can't sleep."

"Then let's read. I don't suppose it makes much difference," Bill shrugged. "I imagine they'd insist on waking us up."

They read without turning a page and precisely at eleven the locked bedroom door swung open smoothly and easily. Mr. McNulty bounded into the room.

"By St. Patrick!" he exulted. "You are in a run of luck. Astonishing, positively astonishing."

"I tore up the ticket!" Bill shouted.

"No matter," Mac assured him. "To win you need not attend. And we have the stub. You shall not be cheated."

Two lean, hungry-looking Egyptians entered the room carrying one end of a rolled-up rug. Two more supported the back end. Terry examined the tableau and then tapped Bill on the shoulder.

"Well, Caesar, what have you to say now?"

"It's impossible," Bill moaned.

"I said the exact thing," Mac laughed. "But there was the name. Bill Sampson. So, we bundled her up and here we are." He gave the signal for the Egyptians to lower the rug. They placed it gently on the floor, held one end, and propelled the remainder forward. Mr. McNulty drew a deep breath.

"Arise, O Flower of the Nile," he intoned proudly. "Arise, O First Prize for this week."

The occupants of the room waited silently but the First Prize failed to arise. Mr. McNulty bent over the supine Cleopatra. A gen-

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tle, but royal, little snore rose from the Flower of the Nile.

"Hmm," Mr. McNulty murmured. He nudged the nearest portion of Cleopatra with the toe of his shoe. She yawned.

"You shouldn't have," Terry told Mr. McNulty. "She was so comfortable."

"Sleep," muttered McNulty. "All she thinks about."

" I heard that," Cleo said, adjusting a strategic bit of silk. "It's not so. There are a few other things I think about. Where is he?"

She arose languidly and surveyed the room. Bill shrank down in bed. Cleo studied him.

"You are—?"

"Not the same one," he said meekly. "That one had muscles."

Cleo smiled a very warm, Egyptian sort of smile.

"I'd say you were more than mere skin and bones yourself."

"Take your eyes off him!" Terry snapped. "You're not buying a camel."

Mr. McNulty clapped his hands and two of the attendants forcibly removed Terry from the room. Mr. McNulty and the other two Egyptians followed them. Cleopatra and Bill Sampson looked at one another. After a minute of this Cleo arched an eyebrow.

"Obviously times have changed," she observed. "Why in the old days all I had to do was show one leg and before you could say 'Mark Anthony' the men—"

"G.B. wrote a fine play about you," Bill interrupted hastily.

"Who did?"

"George Bernard Shaw," Bill said. "A very fine play."

"Any nasty cracks?"

"Not a one," Bill assured her. "When the curtain rises . . ."

Terry sat on the lowest stair and smoldered. Once she stomped up a few steps and confronted Mr. McNulty.

"Are you still selling chances?" she demanded.

"Yes, I am," he said. "I have a few books with me."

"Any on Don Juan?" Terry inquired. Mr. McNulty inspected his books.

"No. He hasn't agreed to it yet."

"Alexander the Great?"

"No."

"Sir Lancelot?"

"Sorry," Mr. McNulty apologized. Terry stomped back to her place. A little later Cleopatra appeared at the head of the stairs, dragging her rug behind her.

"I'm dog-tired," she yawned. Roll me up and let's head home."

Terry dashed upstairs and burst into the bedroom.

"Why was she tired?" she demanded. Bill closed his eyes.

"She is perpetually tired," he told her. "She didn't move off her rug. I recited most of *Caesar and Cleopatra*. And I had to wake her up at the end or she'd still be here."

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Terry sat gingerly on the bed.

"Twice now I've been removed from my own bedroom—because of chance books. Helen of Troy for you. Cleopatra for you. No Don Juan! No Alexander! No Sir Lancelot!"

"What?"

"And you think it's nice that I use Sarah's washing machine."

"Terry—"

"Next week. Coming to this bedroom. Salome!"

"It couldn't possibly happen," Bill swore. "Even McNulty was amazed that I won twice. I think this crazy thing is finished."

"If she comes—even with fourteen veils—I'm leaving," Terry threatened.

"Baby, I—"

"She'll come dancing out of the bedroom with your head on a tray," Terry sobbed.

"Honey, never once—"

"Salome arrives, I leave," Terry said. "Now I'm going to sleep, and you needn't say another word."

"You said you believed me," Bill grumbled.

"Ha! Suppose you were on the steps and I was in here with Genghis Khan?"

"That's different," Bill stated. "Neither of you could be trusted."

"What!"

"See? Now you know how I feel," he said. They both turned their backs and lay silent. When Terry decided to resume the argument Bill was asleep.

"Maybe we should have gone away for the day," Terry said, on the evening of the final drawing.

"He brought Helen from Troy and Cleopatra from Egypt. Where could we go that he wouldn't find me?" Bill asked.

"It's just that the bedroom rug is beginning to show the wear," Terry complained.

"I'm sure I won't win again."

"I've heard that before."

"Should we lock the door again?" Bill asked.

"Might just as well hang out the Welcome sign and have Herod playing the drums in the living room," Terry answered.

"You're taking a defeatist attitude," Bill said.

"I'm taking a leaving attitude if she shows up," Terry insisted.

They opened their books and waited. At eleven o'clock the door swung open and Mr. McNulty swung in. He was jubilant.

"It can't be," Bill moaned as Mr. McNulty's companions filed in. Mr. McNulty was so excited he had difficulty speaking.

"Three in a row. Heavens! I—why," he stuttered, shaking his hands with delight. "Unheard of. And from one of my books each time. I'm the envy of the Association."

Terry climbed out of bed and headed for the door. Bill watched in anguish.

"You can't go like that! Not in your nightgown!"

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"I left my clothes in the living room," Terry said coldly. "And my bags are packed too. Just tell her to keep the music low so as not to disturb the neighbors."

"Baby!" Bill called. He started after her but his way was barred.

"Come now," Mr. McNulty encouraged. "You must accept the prize. That's one of the rules."

Terry was dressed and had her hand on the door when Bill called from the head of the stairs.

"Terry!"

She looked up and shook her head.

"Wait," he said. "Salome isn't here."

Terry released the door handle.

"I didn't win First Prize this time. Second Prize," Bill explained. "More in your line."

Terry placed her bags on the floor and started up the stairs.

"Byron?" she asked, excitedly. Bill frowned.

"No."

Terry flew up.

"Lord Nelson?"

Bill took her arm and led her into the bedroom. Mr. McNulty and his company were gone. Terry's eyes opened wide and she threw her arms around the Second Prize.

Bill smiled.

"Imagine a raffle having Salome for First Prize and a washing machine for Second."

Coming Next Month

It's hard to say which is "the feature story" next month: the issue will open with Chad Oliver's *Between the Thunder and the Sun,* one of the longest and most deeply touching of Oliver's studies in the ethics (and adventure) of interstellar anthropology, and will close with Ward Moore's *Adjustment,* the ironically delightful story of a new (and singularly enjoyable) form of mental therapy. To round out the May F&SF, on the stands in late March, there'll be the return of the captivating Anderson-Dickson Hokas in a zany novelet of galactic espionage, short stories by Zenna Henderson and other favorites, and the F&SF debuts of two rising young writers: Robert Silverberg and Carol Emshwiller.

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Chad Oliver is, by profession, an anthropologist; but he leaves the anthropoligical s.f. in this issue to Murray Leinster. For Oliver's true love is neither science fiction nor anthropology, but jazz—especially authentic New Orleans. In his teens he worked in a record store, where he became "something of a consultant on old jazz records"; he plays "a little piano and drums"; and a year ago he launched his own hour-long disc-jockey program (on KHFI-FM, Austin, Texas), feeling that the air is full of rhythm-and-blues and Hit-Parade-"popular" music—both of which the uninformed tend to confuse with jazz—and that one of America's most distinctively valid heritages is shamefully overlooked. Rich in affection and knowledge, Oliver has created an excitingly infectious story of yesterday's jazz in the world of tomorrow.

Didn't He Ramble

by CHAD OLIVER

THE OLD MAN SAT IN A SOUNDPROOF room. He was elegantly dressed in evening clothes, although he had discarded his formal cape at the moment, and his well-manicured fingers were busily tapping out time against the frosted side of his cocktail glass.

The old man's name was Theodore Pearsall, a fact of some importance since he was one of the richest men in the world. Money did not interest him, however; it was only a means to an end.

He reached out a soft pink hand and made a slight adjustment, turning one of the twenty-two knobs on his chair-arm a fraction to the left.

"Play that thing!" Theodore Pearsall shouted, surprisingly. "Do it, Dippermouth!"

Dippermouth obliged.

A gleaming tape, preserving music almost two hundred years old, slid into position behind the transparent plastic safety shield. It fed itself into the shining player, and music surged from the ultra-high-fidelity speaker that spanned one entire wall.

Louis Armstrong, of course. One of the good old good ones, as Satchmo himself used to say: "Po-

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tato Head Blues," cut by the Hot Seven away back in 1927, with Louis still sticking to the vibrant cornet.

Pearsall closed his eyes, and smiled. His whole face relaxed. His polished shoe thumped on the thick carpet. There was Johnny Dodds's driving clarinet, and those wonderful tailgate smears from Kid Ory's trombone. . . .

"Those were the days," Pearsall whispered happily.

He was quite lost now.

The speaker tirelessly recreated the past, and the legendary men played again: Sidney Bechet's inventive soprano sax, King Oliver swapping breaks with Little Louis, and Bix, impossible Bix, blowing those springwater-pure notes so cleanly it broke your heart—

Jelly Roll Morton then, singing out his genius and his despair:

I could sit right here and think
a thousand miles away,
I could sit right here and think
a thousand miles away. . . .

The thick door opened and slammed with a jarring crash.

Pearsall turned, expecting a robot, but it wasn't a robot—at least not quite.

It was Laura, his wife.

She was wearing her crucified expression.

"In case you've forgotten, Theodore, we're Having A Party upstairs tonight." (She said it in capital letters, as always.) "The least you could do would be to come up and *mingle* with our guests."

Pearsall considered the matter, silently.

"Can't you turn that thing off while I'm talking to you? Are you drunk, Theodore?"

"Not yet," he assured her, and turned Jelly Roll back into the long silence of the centuries.

He looked at his wife, without pleasure. Laura was beautifully dressed, of course, all silks and ruffles, and she had kept her figure well. He wondered if he had ever loved her.

"Are you coming?"

"Looks that way, chicken."

She beamed at him. "We're playing charades," she said triumphantly, and hurried out the door.

Theodore Pearsall shuddered, drained his drink, and stood up.

"One more night," he told himself, savoring the words.

He looked around the friendly room and smiled a little.

Then he marched upstairs, much as a man might stroll out to greet a firing squad in the cold gray light of dawn.

He hooked his thumbs in his evening suspenders, more to annoy Laura than anything else, and surveyed the scene.

There's no place like home, he thought sourly.

It was plush, he had to give it that. The furnishings of the huge living room were flamboyantly

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non-functional, as modern trends demanded: heavy wine drapes flopping over the leaded windows, glittering chandeliers blazing down on thick flowered carpeting, a profusion of tastefully worm-eaten antique chairs, a couple of iron-hard couches covered in stiff brocade, a scattering of spindly tables, gewgaws, and assorted gingerbread.

He snapped his fingers.

"Sir?" said the gleaming robot that flashed to his side.

"A glass of gin, if you will be so kind."

Robots are not equipped with a look of disapproval, but this one made a creditable try.

"Sir?"

"Put an olive in it so it'll look like a martini. And hurry."

The robot glided toward the bar with a distinct air of aloofness.

There was a lot of well-mannered laughter, and some of it quite possibly was genuine. The room was full of antiseptically clean people. All the men had red faces and distinguished gray hair. All the women were delicately pale, in stunning slither-gowns, as lovely as butterflies and with brains to match.

One portly gentleman, with a kind of desperate gravity, was imitating a rocket in outer space.

The robot arrived with a sweating glass on a tray.

Pearsall took the glass, popped the olive into his mouth, and fortified himself with a slug of clear gin. He affixed a transparently false smile to his face and moved forward.

It was, he reflected, precisely the sort of party that the scandal tapes were always screaming about. IS THEODORE PEARSALL A HEDONIST? WHAT'S WITH THE DOLL IN PEARSALL'S HALL? IS TEDDY A BEAR?

The item the tapes forgot to mention was that the whole business was a crashing bore.

A perfumed hand touched him.

"Here you are, you nice man!" It was Jenny, wife of one of the vice-presidents of one of his companies. She had been a looker once upon a time, and still dressed like a siren. Unhappily, she was incurably vivacious. "We're going to be partners!"

"Goody," said Pearsall, allowing himself to be led toward the crowd.

An old, old song was spinning through his head:

Lord, I'd rather drink muddy water,
Sleep in a hollow log . . .

Big Gate, there. Jack Teagarden. Born down in Texas, raised in Tennessee—

One more night.

He patted Jenny absently on the head, and did his duty in an interminable game of charades.

Much later, after the guests had departed and Laura had gone to

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her bedroom, Pearsall hurried down into his soundproof vault and locked the door behind him.

His mind was quite clear, despite the gin, and he was as excited as a boy about to snag his first brook trout.

He pulled out a concealed phone line. It was a direct hook-up; no need to touch the dial.

"Williams?"

"Ah, Mr. Pearsall! We thought you might have forgotten us."

"Hardly." He sneaked a look around the room to reassure himself. "Is everything ready?"

"It's waiting for you, sir. And a fine job it is, if I do say so myself."

"Well, make it snappy, Williams. My affairs here are all in order, and there's a trust fund to take care of Laura. I'm ready to go."

"Now?"

"Now. Tonight. As soon as possible."

"As you wish, sir. Ah, there's one small item—"

"Yes?"

"The girls, as you specified, will be real ones, working in relays. Excellent—ummm—local color. Now, the Patrol has made discreet inquiries of this office, Mr. Pearsall. They seem to feel that as long as the girls are there—so close to home, as it were—they were wondering whether it would be permissible for off-duty Patrolmen to . . . how shall I say it—make use of the unusual facilities available—"

Pearsall snapped his fingers. "Excellent!" he beamed. "A gasser!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean, it's wonderful. The money, of course, will go to help defray the expense of the project?"

"A businessman to the end, Mr. Pearsall! Precisely what we had in mind."

"And Laura will never know where I am?"

"You may rely on our absolute discretion, sir. In fifty years of service, our firm has never had a complaint."

"Tonight, then, Williams. Step on it. Use the rear entrance."

"As you wish, sir. Our representative will carry the contract with him; please read it carefully on the trip out. If I may be of any further service, it will be my pleasure."

"Thank you, Williams."

He broke the connection. He had never felt so alive, so eager. He paced the floor, his face beaming.

He cut in the music.

"Muskrat Ramble!"

"Save It Pretty Mama!"

"Way Down Yonder In New Orleans!"

They came for him at four in the morning, long before Laura was awake.

As far as the world he had known was concerned, he vanished without a trace.

The ship climbed into the sunrise on a ladder of flame. She

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lanced through mountains of clouds, and then the familiar blue of the sky faded and darkened, and she was in space.

Pearsall had been in space before, and it did not enchant him. True, the cold lights of the stars were lovely against their backdrop of velvet, and the sun was a yellow blaze of glory. But it was life that called to Pearsall, all the life that he had missed, all the smells and sounds and joys and heartaches he had heard about and read about, but never experienced.

And space was an infinite sea of death.

It was not for him.

Not yet.

His old blue eyes skipped over the contract.

". . . and on the basis of the Purchaser's life expectancy as determined by the Company's physicians, and verified by the Purchaser's personal physicians, the Company agrees to provide, supply, and maintain said Project according to the Purchaser's specifications, until such a time as said Project can no longer be of any use to the Purchaser, whereupon said Project and Property revert to the Company, for whatever use . . ."

He read the rest of it, and signed it.

He knew, of course, that it was now possible for doctors to calculate a patient's very hour of death with certainty. Accidents could kill a man before his time, but there had been no case since the year 2100 of a man living *past* his expected death date—and techniques of diagnosis and prognosis had improved some since then. Naturally, this was one item of information that doctors were forbidden by law to give to their patients.

It was better not to know.

He sat back in his seat, his eyes closed. The power was off now, as the ship coasted silently toward Mars, and beyond. He couldn't sleep, didn't want to sleep. He felt no regret for what he was leaving behind him. He had no children, and his marriage to Laura had been one of convenience, nothing more. His money had been inherited for the most part, and had brought him no happiness. Earth itself was a fossil; exciting things were happening on other worlds, but he had not been qualified to go.

No, he was well rid of it—all of it.

It was what was ahead that counted.

A world of his own, his kind of world, with his kind of people.

His heart hammered in his chest, his eyes grew bright.

This won't do, he thought. *Mustn't overexcite myself.*

He took two sleeping pills, and dozed off.

The ship had nosed into the Company's section of the Asteroid Belt between Mars and Jupiter and was braking her acceleration before he woke up. He brushed the white

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hair out of his eyes and stared out through the viewscreen. Thousands of tiny worlds hung there in space, moving through tightly-calculated orbits.

Each world was a man's dream come true, and each one was different. He had heard rumors of some of the early ones: a world where there was a major sporting event every four hours, a world that was a hunter's paradise of swift streams and fearless animals, a world that was an erotic dream come to life . . .

The ship matched velocities exactly with a dimly glimpsed shape. There was a *chunk* as the two coupled together, airlock to airlock.

"We're here, sir," a voice said.

Theodore Pearsall stood up, his fists clenched tightly, his breath coming very fast.

"We're here," he repeated.

He moved toward the door.

Then he was inside and the ship was gone.

He smelled it first: a wet, heavy river-smell. He drew it into his lungs, tasting it, savoring it. It hung over the city like a sweet, invisible fog.

The River.

Ole Miss.

Then he heard it. His eyes misted. Music: clear as a bell, liquid as the river itself, lifting into the air like a buoyant, living thing. It sent a shiver down his spine and he began to run, just a little.

He hardly saw the old frame buildings with their towers and chimneys, didn't feel any of the smiling people he bumped into, ignored the whispered invitation that drifted down from behind a second-story shutter.

He started to turn in through two white swinging doors at a place called Tom Anderson's. He was close enough to the music to reach out and touch it, but he stopped. He listened.

More music.

Coming down the street.

There it was, rounding the corner. A wagon, pulled by a team of horses. A sign on the wagon, advertising a dance. And a band, letting fly with "Milneburg Joys." No piano, of course, but drums, guitar, and string bass. A youngster on cornet, sitting on a box. An older man playing clarinet, sitting beside him. And sitting on the back edge of the wagon, his feet dangling down, his golden trombone slide flashing in the sun—

Kid Ory.

He was younger than in most of the pictures you saw, even though the Kid had never really aged. He looked perhaps twenty-five, a handsome Creole man, and the power in his horn shored up the band like a rock-solid two-by-four. As Pearsall watched, Ory took his lips away from the mouthpiece and shouted something to him in French.

Pearsall flushed; he couldn't

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catch the words. But he grinned and waved back at him. The Kid nodded, counted with his horn, swung into the intricate slides of "Ory's Creole Trombone."

The wagon passed by, the music still lingering in the warm, humid air, like a crisp painting slowly fading in the sun.

Pearsall walked into Tom Anderson's and stepped up to the bar.

"Mistah Theodore Pearsall!" the bartender said, beaming from ear to ear.

"Call me Ted," Pearsall said. It was the first time in his life he had ever said it. It felt good.

"Yassuh. What'll it be?"

"Scotch and water, please."

The man poured it out, handed it to him. Pearsall reached for his money.

"Don't cost you nothin', Mistah Ted. On the house."

Pearsall turned away, feeling better than he had felt in years. He had to hand it to the Company: they were doing the job up brown.

The leader of the band, a Negro Pearsall didn't recognize at first, nodded gravely to him, tapped his foot, and blew into his horn—blew down into it, digging for the low ones. "Tishomingo Blues"—Lord, it was Bunk, Bunk Johnson and the boys. It was flowing, understated New Orleans jazz, and it was the whole group that played it, not a crew of soloists.

Pearsall watched and listened and sipped his drink. He thought: *They're all out there, right now, waiting for me. Louis and Sidney and Buddy and Jelly Roll. And Bix, Bix had to be there, even if he hadn't been there in real life. For when dreams come true, they're better than real life ever was, that's why they're dreams. . . .*

He stayed for two hours, just being happy, and then he walked over to his apartment, still in the French Quarter. It was plain but comfortable, with a big brass bed and open windows over the street. The curtains fluttered in the breeze off the river, and he heard a clarinet wailing from far away.

Dodds? Fazola, maybe?

No matter.

There was a newspaper on the stand by the bed, a *real* newspaper, not a tape. He glanced at the date.

June 17, 1917.

If he caught the significance of that date, he gave no sign.

But he never again read a newspaper, and he deliberately lost track of time.

A cornet, stabbing out the melody.

A trombone, sliding and stomping, backing it up.

A clarinet, a lyric clarinet, weaving around them, singing.

Three rhythm, propelling it, giving it a base to walk on: drums, string bass, guitar. (Sure, they had used a banjo in those days—but dreams are better.)

Living music, music from the

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heart, music to blow your blues away. Living music, by men who once had lived. Living music that could not die, but could never come again.

Heaven, Utopia, Paradise. It had many names. It was different for every man. To Theodore Pearsall, raised in an easy world of certainties and automation, this was It: everything he yearned for, all the people he wanted, all the happiness and the laughter and the sorrow. He had heard the music once in a museum, and it had called him.

He had answered.

It took money, time, engineering genius. A tiny planetoid between Mars and Jupiter, with a bubble to hold in the air. Artificial gravity, so a man could walk. And a rebuilt Storyville: not all of it, but enough.

The music was real, you couldn't fake it. It had been played by real men, long ago, and caught on records. Then it had been remastered, built into tapes. You couldn't even see the tapes in the horns.

And Louis and Kid and Jelly Roll, all the great ones?

Robots, of course—or androids, to give them their proper names. Brilliant ones. You couldn't tell the difference unless you looked too close. And who would look too close, with all the music, all the booze, all the laughter?

Only some of the girls were real.

No robot was *that* good.

Men build different monuments. There were some, Pearsall knew, who would have been shocked by what he had done with his money. Most would not understand. But here he had found what he wanted: peace and love and music and good times to remember all the days of his life.

He was an old man.

He knew what was important, and what wasn't. A man always knew, looking back.

Others could go conquer the stars, and doubtless it was all worth the effort.

He strolled out of his room, a graceful gal on each arm, a black cigar in his mouth. He moved towards the lights and the music.

Somewhere out on the river, a steamboat whistled.

Pearsall quickened his steps.

It was the Fourth of July, and that was a very important day.

Everybody knew what had happened on the Fourth of July. Back in the year 1900, it was.

Yes, sir.

Louis Armstrong's birthday.

Ted Pearsall sought him out. He was still a kid, still in his teens, but he could already stand up, with that handkerchief in his hand, and the power in his horn was something to hear.

Pearsall dined on a Poor Boy sandwich: half a loaf of French bread sliced down the middle, stuffed with barbecued ham. He

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tried to take Satch to Antoine's for a real meal, but the kid stuck to red beans and rice.

The evening got rolling.

I wish I could shimmy like my sister Kate. . . .

I thought I heard Buddy Bolden say . . .

Oh, it was all there.

Basin Street. Canal Street. Burgundy Street.

And all the great old places: Lulu White's Mahogany Hall, Countess Willie's, Josie Arlington's Five Dollar House. You could look them all up in Tom Anderson's Blue Book, which sold for two bits and listed all the more reputable houses of ill repute—all two hundred of them.

If you get a good man and don't want him taken from you,

Don't ever tell your gal friend what your man can do. . . .

And it was all on the house—or, rather, houses.

He loved it all, the balconies on the houses, the hot evenings as the sun went down, the palm tree in the vacant lot.

He even got a kick out of the smartly uniformed Patrolmen when they came to town. They always dropped in when they were in the vicinity. Sure, they were square as a block of cement, and bone-headed to boot. But it was nice to know that even a Space Cadet had glands.

They all thought he was crazy.

Pearsall sort of had them figured the same way.

August, September, October.

I gotta momma, she live right back o' the jail.

I gotta sweet momma . . .

Mister Jelly Lord, playing his solo piano like an orchestra, beating out "King Porter" in a bar. Brass bands in the streets, swinging by "In Gloryland."

Pearsall stayed up as late as he could, slept when he could, drunk on music.

And then it was November.

November, 1917.

He was sitting in Tom Anderson's when it happened.

He had felt the change all day, without knowing what it was. There was a tension in the air, a waiting. Girls leaning out of windows, looking for something. A dog howling down by the river. A horn sobbing out the blues, somewhere, far away.

He sat at his table. He felt the sweat in the palms of his hands.

Don't let this be the day. Please don't let this be the day.

But it was.

A Patrol officer walked into Tom's, looked around. He was big brass. He nailed something on the wall, something white.

A notice.

Pearsall didn't have to read it. He knew what it said.

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It was in November, 1917, that Storyville had been shut down, killed off by the Navy. That had been the end, the time when the houses had to auction off their furniture and Countess Willie got only a buck and a quarter for her famous white piano, the time when the musicians had to pack up and leave, go to Chicago, go to Los Angeles, go up the river, go anywhere.

Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans . . .

And it was happening again. The Patrol was the Navy now, and they were putting the old padlock on the Land of Dreams.

Pearsall wasn't afraid, but he knew what was coming.

". . . the Company agrees to provide, supply, and maintain said Project . . . until such a time as said Project can no longer be of any use to the Purchaser. . . ."

They had known that he was dying. The doctors knew everything.

Well, hell.

It was nice and artistic, the way they were doing it.

He had no regrets.

The road to the cemetery was lined with people.

There was a lot of crying and wailing, but the people were listening, too. That was as it should be, for there had never been a band like this before.

Louis was there, and Bix, and Bunk. Ory's trombone, and Teagarden's. Bechet and Dodds and Fazola on clarinets. Minor Hall, his drum muffled with a handkerchief.

They played the plaintive "Flee As A Bird" all the way to the graveyard, where the bearers lowered the body into the ground. The preacher said the words.

Minor Hall took the handkerchief out of his snare.

He hit the march beat, the happy beat, and the band fell into line.

That was the way it was in New Orleans: sadness that a man had died, then joy that he was marching with the saints.

What did they play?

They blew "Didn't He Ramble."

First Louis had the lead, then Bix, then Bunk.

Oh, didn't he ramble!
He rambled round the town
Till the- Butcher cut him down. . . .

They played it with all their hearts, played it for the last time, marching back to Storyville, back to the already-emptying land of dreams.

And as they marched, as the clarinets soared, the Company might, or might not, have been surprised to hear Louis turn to Bix and say, "Old Pops went out in style."

Bix nodded. "It was good to play again," he said, and lifted his cornet toward the river.

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In which the bachelor sage of Strawberry Hill reveals himself, almost 200 years ago, as one of the pioneers of interplanetary love. (The text is taken from Mrs. Paget Toynbee's edition of THE LETTERS OF HORACE WALPOLE, *thanks to the sharp eye of Edith A. Standen.)*

Saturnian Celia

by **HORACE WALPOLE**

Extracts from a letter to the Rev. William Mason (1725-1797)

[May, 1774]

. . . If I was as good a poet as you are, I would immediately compose an idyl, or an elegy, the scene of which would be laid in Saturn or Jupiter; and then, instead of a niggardly soliloquy by the light of a single moon I would describe a night illuminated by four or five moons at least, and they should be all in a perpendicular or horizontal line, according as Celia's eyes (who probably in that country has at least two pairs) are disposed in longitude or latitude. You must allow that this system would diversify poetry amazingly.—And then Saturn's belt! which . . . is not round the planet's waist, like the shingles; but is a globe of crystal that encloses the whole orb, as you may have seen an enamelled watch in a case of glass. . . .

Pray send me an eclogue directly upon this plan; and I give you leave to adopt my idea of Saturnian Celias having their everything quadrupled—which would form a much more entertaining rhapsody than Swift's thought of magnifying or diminishing the species in his *Gulliver*. How much more execution a fine woman could do with two pair of *piercers!* or four! and how much longer the honeymoon would last, if both the sexes have (as no doubt they have) four times the passions, and four times the means of gratifying them!

I have opened new worlds to you. . . . Dryden himself would have talked nonsense and, I fear, indecency, on my plan; but you are too good a divine, I am sure, to treat my quadruple love but platonically. In Saturn, notwithstanding their glass-case, they are supposed to be very cold; but platonic love of itself produces frigid conceits enough, and you need not augment the dose.—But I will not dictate. The subject is new; and you, who have so much imagination, will shoot far beyond me. . . . Good night! I am going to bed.—Mercy on me! if I should dream of Celia with four times the usual attractions!

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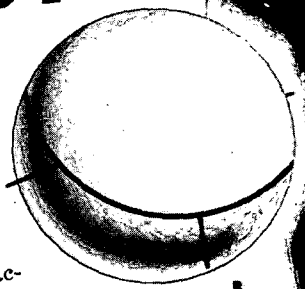

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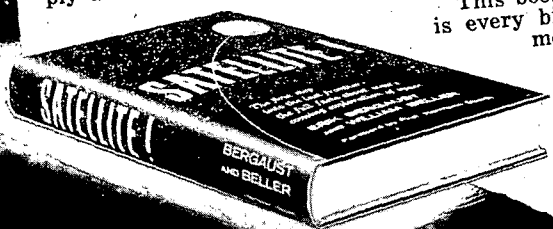

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